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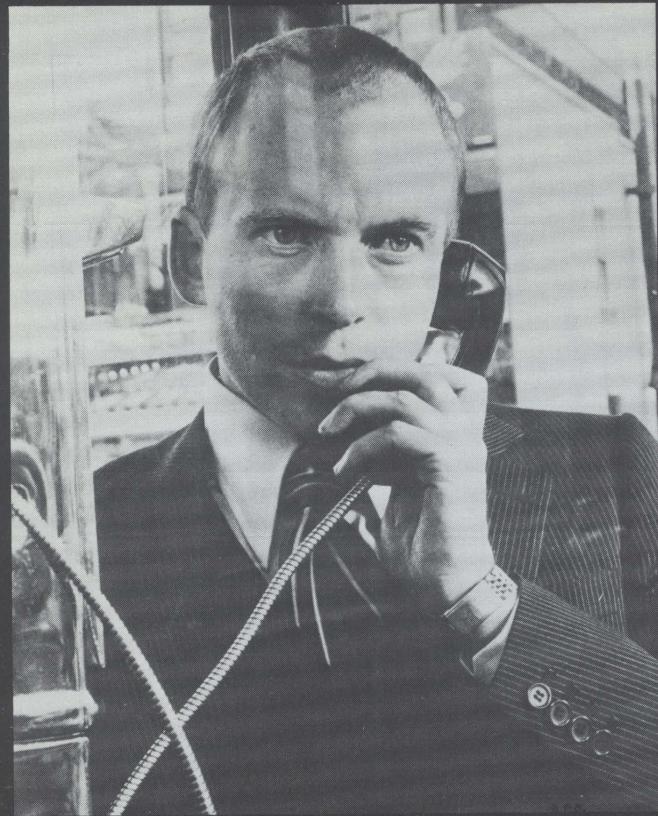
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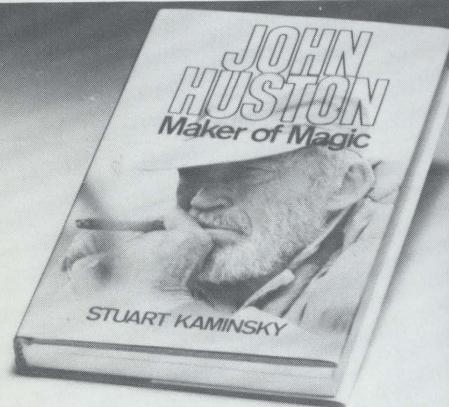
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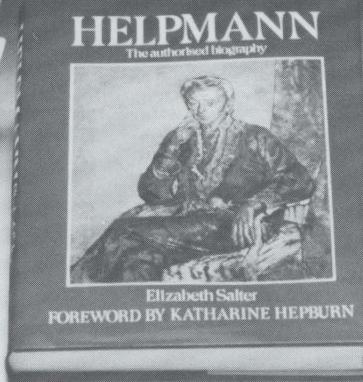
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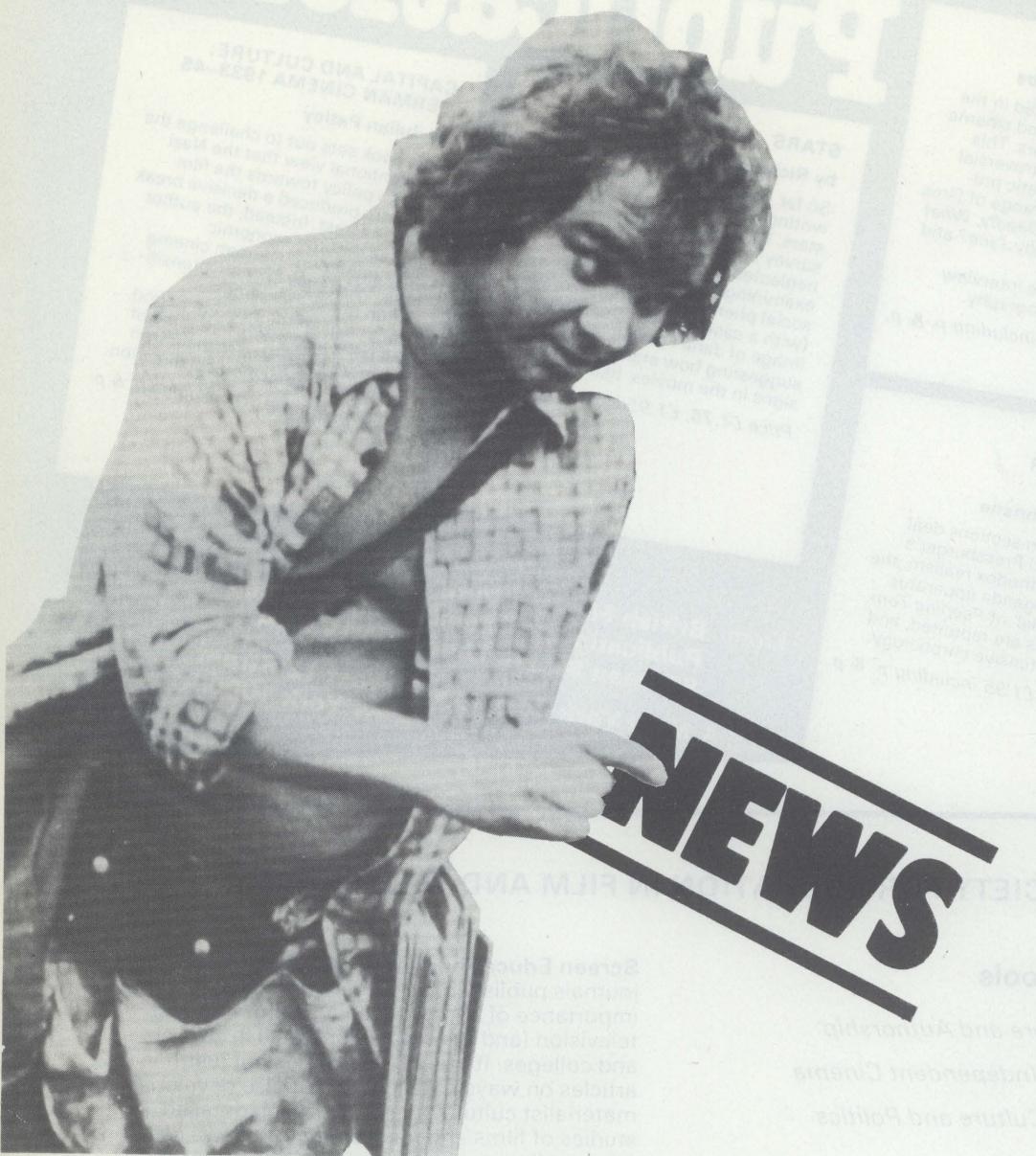
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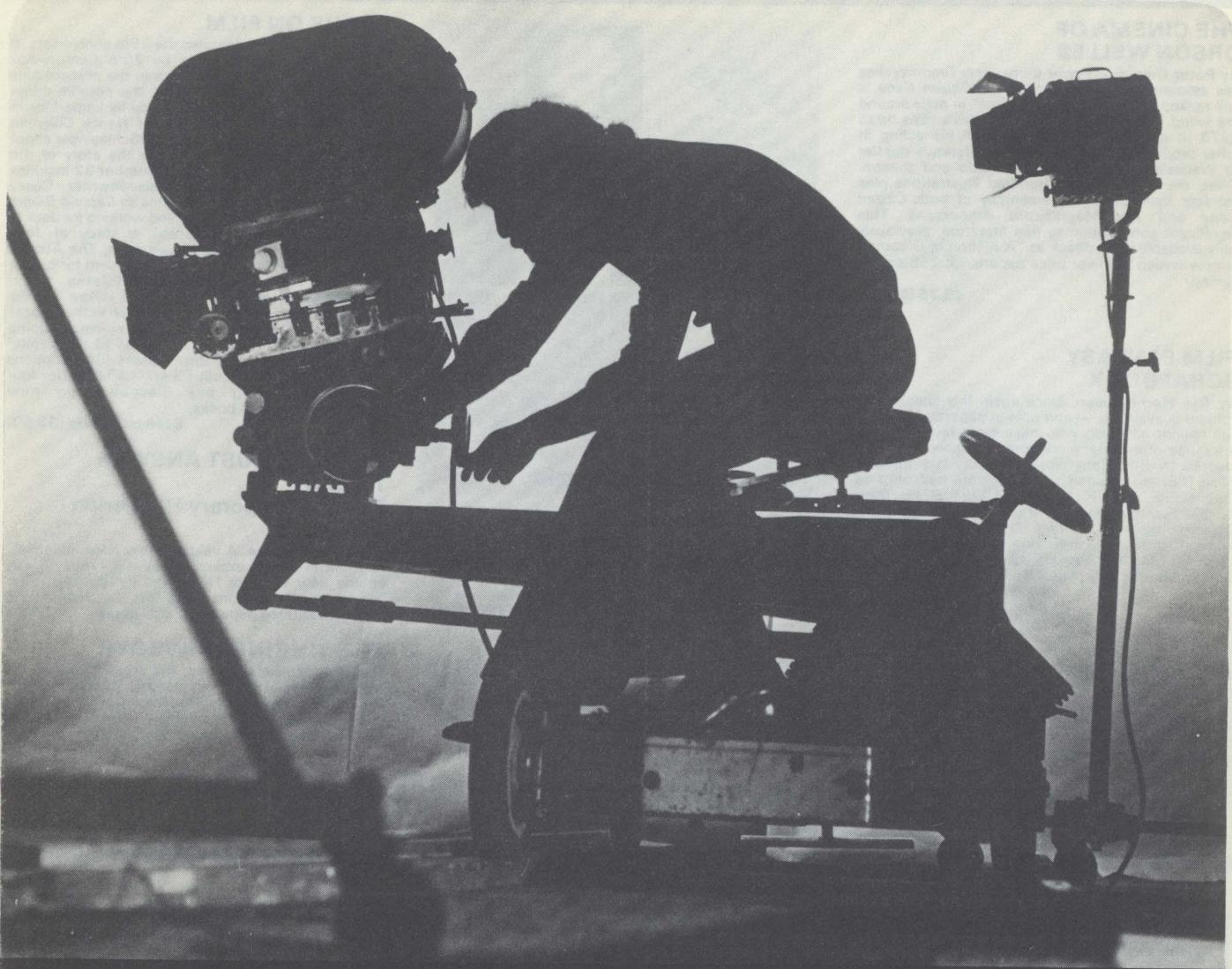
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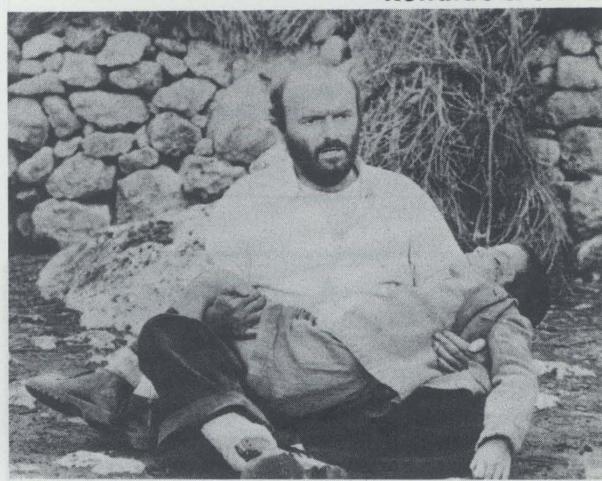
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SIGHT AND SOUND

Volume 48 No. 2

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On the cover: Paul Newman
in Robert Altman's 'Quintet'

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NEW MAN AT THE

Penelope Houston



On January 15, Mamoun Hassan took over as managing director of the National Film Finance Corporation. The appointment is unusual and challenging; perhaps a victory for the Association of Independent Producers pressure group, which has been working with great energy to impress on the Government the needs of the film-makers outside the big battalions and the American companies. Certainly it sets a new style, in that for the first time this key job goes to a film-maker. Mamoun Hassan's predecessor, Sir John Terry, who took over 21 years ago and has had to keep the NFFC going through recent years of chronic under-funding, was a lawyer.

Mamoun Hassan was in charge of the BFI Production Board operations from 1971 to 1974, producing Kevin Brownlow's *Winstanley*, Bill Douglas' *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk*, David Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* and Peter Smith's *A Private Enterprise*, among other films. He has been a cogent and resolute supporter of a great tradition of British film-making. After leaving the BFI, he worked for the United Nations and more recently has been teaching direction at the National Film School.

The NFFC's finances are being put on a firmer footing (amount unknown at the time of writing, but £5m has been a widely quoted figure), so that it has some real chips to play with in the great gamble of trying to inject new confidence into the British cinema. Mamoun Hassan, taking an optimistic but realistic view of the possibilities, gave us this interview in early January, shortly before taking up his appointment.

You have said that your appointment might be regarded as rather a curious one, or at least unexpected . . .

MAMOUN HASSAN: Well, the last three managing directors of the NFFC have been an accountant, a banker and a lawyer, so to appoint a film-maker is certainly curious, unless it means the Government has accepted that the situation has changed so drastically that it calls for a completely new approach. Thirty years ago, when the Corporation was set up, we had something like fifteen hundred million cinema admissions a year in Britain;

last year the figure was 107 million. And basically the way the Corporation originally operated was that they financed producers. They didn't look too closely at the scripts; they backed a producer, and if he or she failed they stopped financing him, and if he succeeded they tended to finance his next project, and so on. Even then, the kind of projects they were getting were not necessarily those with the least risk attached. But there was a home market, you could earn your bread and butter on that market, and since no film was supported without a

guarantee of distribution you tended to feel fairly safe. Also, of course, the Corporation used to put its money into a film last, and it was seen very much as a loan.

That's a long time ago. Things have changed gradually over the last twenty-five years, so that instead of merely rubber-stamping the decisions of the distributors the Corporation has had more and more to take a decision itself as to whether a film was commercially viable. They've had to question what kinds of films were coming in, to exercise a different kind of judgment. So it was felt that they needed someone who could do that—a producer or a film-maker of some kind.

Also, the NFFC is having to put up a larger share of a film's budget, isn't it?

The Corporation went first from giving only the end money to having a *pari passu* involvement, which also changed the relationship with the industry. If you go in *pari passu*, financially that is a more responsible position. Also, with the risk becoming ever greater and the American involvement as always uncertain, the Corporation has of course found itself being asked to invest larger and larger shares. Recently we put up nearly a hundred per cent for Ken Loach's *Black Jack* and the major share of James Ivory's *The Europeans*. I would rather not put up a hundred per cent, because it cuts down on the number of films we can back and in any case we couldn't do it with the more expensive projects. But the fact is that if you want to make a British film which is not regarded by the Americans as attractive for their market, then you are not going to get full finance from anyone except the NFFC—other than from the odd gambler or bold spirit. You are not going to get even half the money from anyone else. And I think

we will find ourselves more and more having to bite this particular bullet.

What about television money?

For that we will have to look largely outside Britain. There was the case of *The Shout*, where Euston Films invested half the budget, about £200,000, but that was just Euston investing as a company, not as a television subsidiary. I think we are going to have to look to the European television organisations and to the North American companies, including the Canadians, for pre-sales to top up our own investment. It's uncertain and difficult to make it work financially, and it does mean a lot of research, and investigation into whether the money is really secure. But more and more we at the NFFC are going to have to be responsible for finding the finance for a film, either by putting it all up ourselves or by going out to find the rest of the money if there is a project that excites us. Because the independent producers themselves are going to find it very difficult to hunt around. Tony Garnett and Ken Loach have a track record; Merchant and Ivory can approach the television companies because their films have already been shown on the various European networks. But what about the unknowns whose films have *not* been shown? We are going to have to do the work for them, or at least help them. And with that in mind, it's inevitable that we are going to have some kind of marketing or distribution arm to our activities.

That is what the AIP has been arguing for, isn't it?

Yes, and people outside AIP. But, you know, there are more than 400 film-makers in the AIP, ranging from the latest film school graduate to Lindsay Anderson and Sam Peckinpah. It's not some kind of monolithic organisation where everyone thinks alike. But one thing I do find refreshing about AIP is that it is at least trying not to exercise simply its own prejudices. It is doing research to find out what is actually happening; and that has not so far been done by any body that I know of in Britain, or not in a serious way. The larger organisations are too much involved with the American market to be interested, and the rest tend to be independents who simply haven't the capacity to undertake this work on their own.

Is the Department of Trade supporting this kind of research?

The relationship has, I think, been a very useful one. The Department of Trade tempers AIP's idealism and the AIP encourages and supports their boldness. And although there are disagreements, there is no question but that there is a sharing of all available information. I am convinced that both sides really are looking for ways to change the situation. We have to find something new or we might as well give up. But the film-makers have to do their bit, which means creating the films that are going to appeal at least to British audiences and which will generate some real energy.

At the moment, in so far as there is a British film industry, much of it is based in America, through such enterprises as EMI, and many of the film-makers would probably just as soon work in the United States.

Of course people want to go abroad when the atmosphere in Britain is so debilitating.



Ken Loach's 'Black Jack', for which the NFFC put up 'nearly a hundred per cent'

And I am not particularly upset by EMI wanting to make its money in America, if that is where it thinks its profits are. But I am exercised by one thing: that on the one hand EMI is choosing to invest in America, and that on the other hand EMI as a distributor, as one of the duopoly, is making key decisions about British cinema as well. It can't help but do so. If it wants to lose its money in America, let it. *Convoy* may have made a little money, a few other films will make money, but in the long run I think it will go the way of all British investors in the American film market—eventually EMI is likely to lose its shirt, because in the end there is no reason why it should be tuned in to the needs and preferences of the American market. But that is all up to EMI. The one thing I object to is that this company is also making some very important decisions about the kind of films that should be made and distributed in this country.

So how does the NFFC try to adjust that situation?

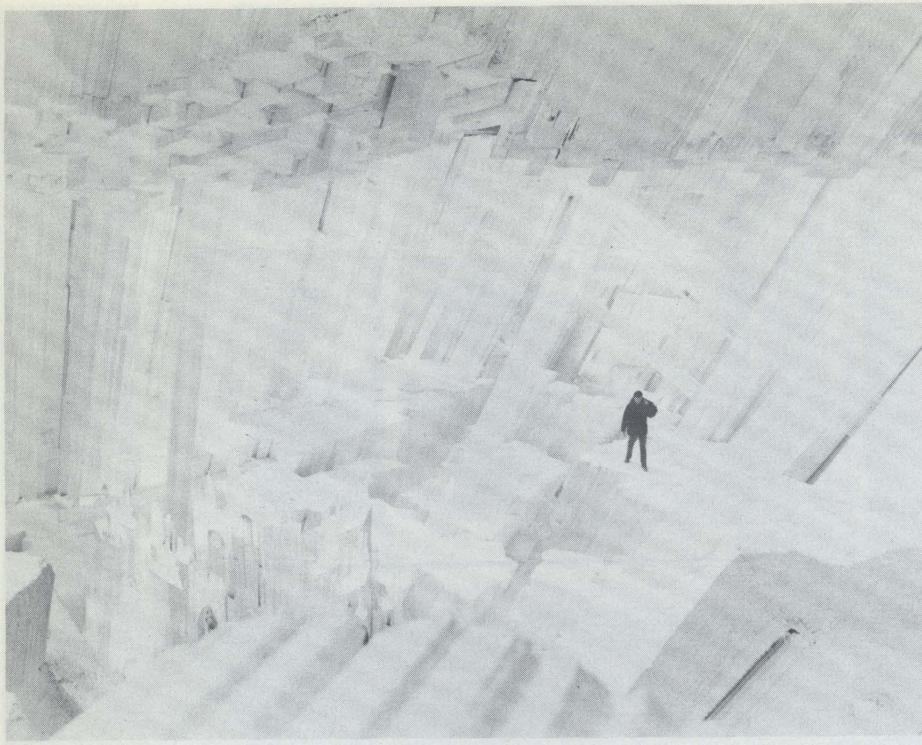
We are going to have a very small amount of money compared to the finance available to EMI or Rank. What we can do is say to the British film-makers that here at least is one body which will consider their projects on a continuing basis, and will not be put off by the fact that these projects are based in Britain—in fact quite the opposite, which will be excited by it. That is the difference. And if we can support a dozen films or so on that basis in the next year or two, we have a real chance of creating a different climate. After all, how much money was actually invested in the Nouvelle Vague or Free Cinema films?

You can change the climate quite dramatically with a little money if you also convince people that they are being listened to, that they don't have to pretend to be Americans—or for that matter pretend to be Germans, or anything else. That is an argument I have heard in AIP and which I don't believe to be the answer: that we should become more European rather than more American.

Britain is an offshore island, and I think one has to fight for one's own. I'm speaking as an Arab living in England, not as some kind of little Englander; I'm talking about reflecting the kind of life that we all lead here, which to me is the important thing. I'm not concerned about the nationality of the film-makers: if Kurosawa wanted to come here, I'd welcome him; if Antonioni wanted to come back, I'd be very happy; or any interesting and lesser known people. What concerns me is that they should make films which reflect the quality of life here.

We still have the same remit that the NFFC had in 1949; we still have the same engine. Nobody should think that we can somehow miraculously make this old engine from 1949 go at two hundred miles an hour. But we can change a few things, we can retune the engine. And one thing, I believe, is that we cannot continue to operate taking single risks and supporting projects on their own. If the remit is to make films which stand a reasonable chance of a commercial return, then one has to look at a portfolio, at a year's work. One film has a star name, it may look fairly safe; another has no stars and an unknown director and a very oddball script, but you have an intuition that there is genuine talent there and perhaps a film which might also make a lot of money. It may turn out that your oddball film does very well and your safe film loses money: that happens all the time. We must balance risks, of various kinds.

If you treat each film as a one-off, you are always having to play safe; and one thing film history has shown us is that if you go towards the centre, then you fail artistically and you also fail commercially. You are actually courting disaster in every possible way. We are going to ask film-makers to take risks—and I am asking them, because they don't. Most of the scripts we have are lacking in boldness and vigour. But in that case we must be seen to be taking risks as well. That's part of the dialogue we must have with the industry.



'Superman': 'the average goes up . . . because that establishes a new norm for the scale of operations'

Also, although it may be time-consuming and perhaps even painful for me, and irritating for the film-makers who approach the Corporation, I think we are going to have to talk and argue about the scripts. We can't just say yes or no: we must say maybe, let's talk about a second draft and a third draft. And therefore we have to operate like a film company. If film-makers are looking for finance and coming to what they think of as a bank, they may be annoyed to find that they are going to have to talk about their films in a serious way. But I think we have to do this, and we have to consider films in the light of the audience they are aimed at. The size of the audience and the kind of audience is always open to discussion, but I don't want to back films which are not intended to be seen.

Do you think that the actual cinema machinery is there for a real audience in Britain?

No, and that's why we have to get into distribution and marketing ourselves. There is no other industry—if we are talking about film as an industry, and the NFFC is after all a Department of Trade outpost—which will simply manufacture a product and not make some arrangement for selling it. If they are going to insist that this is a commercial activity, then it has to be treated seriously as a commercial activity. We have to look to our market. But I also believe that the market *does* exist. Two years ago, when things were very bad, I wrote a paper in which I suggested that there was going to be an upturn and that people would go back to the cinema. That has happened, and I don't think it is just that people are going out to see a certain type of big American picture. They are going out because they don't want to stay at home, because people don't feel that just to sit at home with a television set is the be all and end all of everything. People want to experience things with each other.

Yes, but even if people want to go to the cinema, and if we had the distribution machinery, are there still the right number of

seats in the right places. Have things run down too far?

That's the big question, and I do think that eventually some larger involvement of the local authorities will be needed. Stanley Reed, ex-director of the BFI, proposed a long time ago that there really is no reason why local authorities should involve themselves in theatre and not in cinema. Of course, they are doing something now through the regional arts associations and the film theatres and so on, but it will all have to be on a larger scale.

What do you see as a reasonable average cost for a film supported by the NFFC?

That is an interesting one . . . Just before Christmas, Lord Grade was berating me in the *Guardian* for what he saw as my turning away from American finance. 'How would he be able to get us the fifty million dollars for *Superman*?' was his challenge. Now, the effect of *Superman*, and of films like *Superman*, is of course that the average goes up, because that establishes a new norm for salaries and for the scale of operations. A student at the National Film School who may soon be doing his first feature as writer-director was talking to me recently, and he saw a film costing about £450,000 as a low-budget movie. I was appalled, but of course it's true: that really is a low-budget movie now. We have had films in for less, but they come from film-makers who know they are not going to get into the big cinemas or the American market and are looking to sales to art houses and to some television outlets, mainly in Europe. Otherwise, you really are talking about films costing half a million pounds.

Now, of Lord Grade's \$50 million (which is a wonderful 'round' figure, isn't it?), we all know that over two million went to Marlon Brando, and I should think ten million to the producers and director and writers, and a lot of the special effects were shot in the States. So we are really talking about fifteen or twenty million spent in Britain. That is fine: it creates work and keeps the studios busy. But

when the Americans go away we are left with our industry still tied in to their system. We find it more and more difficult to make films for £300,000 or thereabouts. More and more British film-makers have to look to the American market, and that takes us back to that vicious circle we cannot get out of, where we rely on the Americans to decide what kind of films we make. In the end, we have to decide who is responsible for our industry.

How do you break that circle?

We break it by making it clear that we will invest in a British cinema, that we will not look to the American market as the sole or essential target, and that we will put up half the money, or even all the money if we are able to get a picture for £300,000. But we also have to talk to the ACTT—in fact, it's already being talked about—along the lines of a two-tier system, looking for greater flexibility in cases where a film is totally British-financed and is the kind of project that really has to be made in Britain.

Would any concessions be in the direction of smaller crews, or lower salaries, or both?

I don't know . . . it might be both. My own experience with the ACTT, when I was at the Production Board, was that they were understanding and generous. Everyone said that the ACTT would not allow us to operate, to make features, without imposing minimum salaries and minimum crews. In fact, they really gave us *carte blanche* to do as we wanted, so long as we in turn did not break faith with them by allowing commercial organisations to rip them off. They don't want to see American companies financing British films on the cheap and then selling them in America and making a lot of money. Nor do I. One thing we have to accept as a fact of life is that the American companies—or some of them, at least—operate very special, not to say creative, accounting methods. So we have to be careful about the kind of deal we are looking for, to be sure that the film-makers and technicians are not ripped off by American concerns. Or by any other concerns, for that matter.

What about the possible role of the British Film Authority, the deliberations of the Wilson Committee, and also the question of the way the Eady system is now functioning?

Our industry in general behaves in a delinquent fashion. It simply doesn't do its duty, as I see it, because it doesn't seek to create the conditions for its continuance. Everyone is out to make his next film, by hook or by crook, and doesn't care too much about what happens afterwards. I don't think we can carry on like that, but the way the Eady Fund is now operating is very much in line with that way of thinking. It is being used to pay for the distribution costs, whereas we ought to be giving it to the producers not for this film but for the next film, so that we are always investing in tomorrow.

There is another way of looking at the film industry, which is the way the Treasury looks at it. They see our way of financing films, the extraordinarily high salaries and the perks and kickbacks that everyone gets, and they see no reason why they should invest in an industry of this kind. In the country's present economic state, they would come under considerable attack at every level of decision-making, from the cabinet and parliament to the press and the media, for investing large

sums of public money in an industry which is so inflated. We have to convince people that we are capable of operating in a serious way before any government of any kind is going to invest real money.

But how can we expect them to invest millions in an industry where the salaries are what they are, and where people are not so much dishonest as extremely optimistic and highly forgetful about how money is spent? With that kind of circus atmosphere, the NFFC is going to have a very hard time persuading government to finance filmmakers on a continuing basis. The only way we can guarantee continuing finance is that some of the Eady money should be assigned to the Corporation. I really believe that; I think it's the only way people are going to invest in tomorrow and not just in today.

Now of course the approach of the industry has been that we should create a British Film Authority to bring all the different film operations together, with the idea that a larger body will sort out problems more rationally, carry more weight, and therefore be able to get more money from the Government. That is a perfectly reasonable approach. My anxiety about such a body, and it is a serious anxiety, is that you can never have too many organisations supporting the cinema but you can have too few. If you centralise control in that way, I am worried that the non-conformist elements could find it very difficult to get access to the money. If we do have a BFA, I'm worried that in ten years time we may all be wondering about finding ways to dismantle it. Because it will be so powerful, and it will be in the hands of the very people who I feel have already failed us for the last quarter of a century, and who are destined to fail us again.

I'm talking here about people like myself, whose arteries will harden. We will become less willing to take risks and more and more confident about what we believe to be true, and eventually we will become a negative force, not so much encouraging films as stopping certain films from being made. I think it's vital to remain open to change, open to disturbance. To me, the BFA does not promise to be such a body.

The report of the Interim Action Committee worries me, because it seems more concerned with administrative detail than with the kind of films we should be making, the real *raison d'être* of the operation. No belief comes out of that document, and you can't be too surprised at that because most of the people involved believe in the present. I don't mean this in any way personally, but they are people who are effective in the world as it is, the 'haves'. A handful of them tried to represent the views of the 'have nots', but there was not even a token 'have not' to speak for himself.

The BFA could become a kind of Swedish Film Institute. If, for instance, you take just the production arm of the Swedish Film Institute, it has three or four different kinds of funds and there is a great deal of argument and enquiry between one committee and another. In the discussions in Sweden which led to the setting up of the various committees, there was much more talk about the different elements in films than there has been in the whole of the British deliberations. One committee had in mind film as a popular medium, and the second was treating it as a popular medium but not forgetting it is an art

form as well, and so on. Even by defining film in that way, you immediately have to agree or disagree or take some stand. 'Is film still a popular medium? What kind of art medium? And bearing this in mind, what then is the appropriate level of finance?' That at least is something you could get excited about. But you can't get excited about a report which defines the BFA as a body which ought to have seven people on a committee, etc.

I'm not against a BFA in principle, but the language used in the discussions does tell one something about the approach, and I'm afraid that it has been very boring. The document itself should be a banner; it should tell us that we are embarked on a great adventure. Unfortunately, it tells us that we will be in the grip of a powerful bureaucratic machine, which in ten years time we are going to have to work very hard to dismantle.

How about areas where there is excitement? What sort of conclusions have you reached from your experience at the Production Board and the National Film School?

It's a curious thing, because at the very time when more and more of our established, senior film-makers are looking to America, we also have all these young film-makers who are basically being supported by the Government and who are clamouring for a British industry. We can't go on like this: something has to give somewhere. You only have to go along to some of the meetings to get a sense of the anger and the frustration. And of course what could happen is that the NFFC could be torn apart between the two—the establishment, really wanting just another banking operation with low interest rates, and the independent sector looking for another kind of support. The Corporation could be mangled between them. Or it could try to stand aside and look objectively at what is available.

As to my Production Board experience... Everyone seems to think that I am just going to do again exactly what I did there, so I should say right away that I don't think one can fire the same arrow twice. I can't do it, and neither can those film-makers. Bill Douglas, Kevin Brownlow, David Gladwell,

Peter Smith... they are not going to make the same films again. They are looking for something else, and that in itself opens up a big subject. What kind of style, what aesthetic should a British film-maker be pursuing now?

It seems to me that the richest seam in British cinema has always been the poetic realist and that our best film-makers have come from that tradition. Has that seam given out? Ought we perhaps to be looking for something else? I don't know. This is an argument we should all take part in, but in any case it is not something for me to hand down to the film-makers, because I don't think it is the job of someone involved in the administration of money to tell people what kind of films they should be making. In any event, those film-makers are not going to make the same films again, nor am I interested in doing the kind of films that we did then. A lot has happened since, and we should be looking for a different style of film for a different and perhaps larger audience.

I'm very encouraged by what I saw at the School. One of the bugbears of British cinema has been the dependence on language, the interminable chat, the way every dramatic point is made by actors portraying garrulous characters who carry the burden of guiding you through the life of the film. Now there seems to be a real turning away from that. There is a return to the 'spectacle' of film—spectacle not in the epic sense, but in the sense of the seen world. Of course some film-makers in Britain have pursued that course: Humphrey Jennings, Lindsay Anderson, Hamer and Mackendrick, Hitchcock, and more recently Douglas and Brownlow, seem to me people who are essentially interested in the total shot. Now more and more of the budding film-makers are interested in the seen and experienced world. But they are not going to come out of the School tomorrow and make their extraordinary contribution overnight.

Because I do feel pursued, slightly, by a sense of great expectations all around... I can't promise you a new film industry in three years' time. I can promise a fight to create that industry, but not on my own. We are all going to have to do it.

'Radio On': a first feature by Chris Petit, now being made by the BFI Production Board, with National Film Finance Corporation support



more or going for the cash... and don't talk to me about one you'll change and come and go before them or that has got you some tradition now... give to him in W. Meadow and from him you do to him and he'll be a blind in more lands and that sort of thing. If change will need events and because history and tradition and need two and has taken time just as another and now you should go back to or change or move? Two now and off road back to S. S. and come and

Kenyan

'Would you say that the more I know how to use a camera, the less I would know about my own people?'

American

'I would say, the more training you have in Western film techniques, the less you can say that you are communicating to your own people.'

Nigerian

'What are these "Western" film techniques? Who makes the cameras, who makes the equipment?'

From the film *Highlights from a Film Workshop*, produced by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

It seems unlikely that the use of an Arriflex camera automatically imposes a Teutonic film style, that an Eclair gives Gallic flair, or that by toting a Japanese Super 8 mm. camera with a power zoom one starts perceiving the world through the eyes of an Oriental (however 'Westernised'). But it is becoming generally accepted that technology is not value-free: to some extent different technologies dictate the way in which we see the world, the way we record and interpret 'reality', and they influence the types of codes we use to communicate a message. But technologies, whatever their source, seem to interact with the cultures into which they are transferred; in some instances they are modified and new methods of using old technologies may be attributed to experimentation based on specific or localised cultural needs not foreseen by the manufacturers of the equipment.

On a more personal level, it is important to me to explore, with the benefit of hindsight, to what extent my five years in Africa (in Ethiopia and Kenya) as a trainer and a producer of educational and cultural film and television material for African audiences were usefully spent, in terms of contributing to the national development effort of the countries concerned. I am prepared to admit that the films and TV programmes may have carried with them, however unconsciously, elements of my personal and cultural sub-codes, viewpoints or ideology, and filmic dialect or idiolect. African schoolchildren, as well as teachers and members of the general public who saw the productions, probably interpreted the messages according to their own codes and viewpoints. But to what extent did these inevitable differences between producer and receiver hinder successful, neutral and natural communication, if at all?

There are other related questions which need to be considered. How do films produced by foreigners for developing country audiences differ from films produced by similar people for audiences back home? One needs to look at how such films are perceived by the subjects of the films—and

these perceptions are coloured as much by structural formal considerations as by political or ideological considerations. The Chinese liked Joris Ivens' footage, but not Antonioni's. Content cannot easily be separated from form, but aspects of form and structure were cited extensively by the Chinese in condemning the Antonioni film, *Chung Kuo*.

My own interest in retrospectively considering films and TV programmes I made in Africa may appear to derive from a relatively unimportant obsession. It is unimportant when one considers the vast amounts of totally foreign material flooding into TV stations and cinemas all over Africa. (Conscious media imperialism and dumping of surplus, or simply a question of supply in response to demand?) It is of minor importance in countries where the number of expatriate producers does not exceed more than one or two. But what about a country like the Ivory Coast, where the number of expatriate (mostly French) personnel who, it is sometimes said, cannot get jobs in the media in their own country, is estimated at over a hundred?

Is there an

Jacqueline Pierce, in her controversial novel *Leopard in a Cage* (Nairobi, 1976), portrays the tensions which can arise, even when only one or two foreigners are brought in to offer technical assistance. In her novel Ms Pierce (a black American living in Tanzania) presents the conflict which develops when an elderly pair of expatriate consultants, Mr and Mrs Goldman, are invited by senior 'Utanyan' government officials to 'share their experience' with the newly formed film unit. He is ex-USAID, she is an anthropologist/musicologist. But the unit, staffed with young Africans committed to the idea of 'African films, made by African people for African people', bitterly resent this intrusion of 'ageing colonialists parading as movie-makers'. They are determined to complete the film they are making in their own way, but the Goldmans have *their* own ideas, not only about the script but also the music. The Goldmans question the historical accuracy of the portrayal of white traders as deceitful exploiters, and object strongly to the traders in the film being presented as homosexuals: 'We feel that this is cultural misrepresentation that could lead to undesirable stereotypes. Why should the only Europeans in the film be sexual deviates?'

It is on the subject of the choice of appropriate 'programme' music for the soundtrack that Ms Pierce really scores a direct hit. Mrs Goldman plays a tape of her own compositions. She tells the African filmmakers to listen carefully; her music, she claims, has a deeper quality of suspense than their selection. But to the Africans it merely sounds 'soft and lulling' and is not at all suggestive of suspense. In another piece, Mrs Goldman bases her composition on an old American cavalry song—and this is supposed to provide an evocative accompaniment for a scene of African villagers on the march!

international film language?

James Potts

How many of us are guilty of using Western mood music from the record library, which may have associations or symbolic value for us quite unperceived by our Third World audience? How many of us have selected indigenous traditional music, which may have very strong ceremonial or social connotations, and used it in quite the wrong context, simply because the rhythm sounded right to our untutored ears, and seemed to fit the picture? Or, what is more common, how many of us have made token use of local music and songs and faded it up and down as necessary, to cover the silences in the commentary, without any regard to the

meaning of the words or to the point in the stanza at which we fade it up or down?

Thinking back over my own experience again, I am led to ask to what degree the technology (the battery-driven Arriflex with its 10:1 zoom lens and its 400 foot magazines, or the clockwork Bolex with its 25 second shot capacity and its 100 foot reels; the TV studio with its three electronic cameras, its elaborate vision-mixing and bank of special 'punctuation' wipe effects, its quadruplex videotape recorder) carried with it values of its own (perhaps alien values) and communication constraints of its own—Independent of the messages my African colleagues or I wanted to communicate. Certainly the presence of certain items, as well as the *absence* of others (e.g. of a sync sound camera or of portable video equipment in Ethiopia) seriously affected both format and contents.

To what extent was the visual language of

my films (or of my African colleagues' films) influenced by, or dependent on, the technological apparatus available; to what extent on our personal sense of style (our idiolects) and particular skills, to what extent on our national outlooks? And, perhaps even more important, considering the current debate about the dangers of exporting professional ideologies (or ideologies of professionalism) to inappropriate situations, to what extent have European-directed training courses been riddled with the ethic and assumptions of 'Western professionalism' (I do not mean anything so explicit as the definitions of professional practice and standards that the BBC or ACTT might offer) which may have been either irrelevant or positively harmful... or which may (as I honestly believe to be the case with most such courses) have been beneficial in terms of trying to instil in students a sense of respect for the highest standards and a craftsmanlike approach? These are attitudes one would try to foster anywhere, whether one is teaching students to make a chair or to make a film.

The problem for the Western technical

The camera, through Kenyan eyes.



co-operation training officer is not easily resolved. Even if he feels guilty of trying to teach his students to make a Chippendale chair, with elaborate dovetail joints, when all they need (and probably prefer from an aesthetic point of view) is a three-legged stool carved from a single piece of wood, or a functional structure banged together with hammer and nails, he cannot always get approval to teach what is *appropriate*. By the act of deciding what is appropriate one becomes in some sense a paternalist. By trying to avoid teaching inappropriate Western professional practices, one may be seen as a man of double standards, denying to Third World film students what one might expect to teach European film school students. One must always remember that professional practices in a country like Britain may be the direct result of years of trade union negotiation and agitation. In the Third World, the highly specialised technician is less useful than the flexible all-rounder. The hardest thing I found to teach in Ethiopia was the concept and practice of visual continuity in film: smoothness of flow, the invisible cut and the use of cut-aways. Are these universal rules, the deep structure of a common, shared language? Or do they derive from a culture-bound (or Hollywood-trained) preference for the dovetail joint over the more visible joints of a native craftsman who has no aesthetic complexes about the overt use of nails?

An example of a different type is provided by Lynne and Grant Masland, in their paper on the cross-cultural implications of the Samoan ETV Project (in R. Arnove's *Educational Television*, Praeger, 1976). American experts worked with Samoans to produce ETV programmes, but: 'Misinterpretations and misunderstandings frequently arose because of lack of awareness. Each culture had patterns that the people took so much for granted that they couldn't imagine ... how things could be structured otherwise. One example of differing patterns for organising spatial relationships took place during the taping of a news program. The set included a large map tacked to the wall behind the newscaster. During the making of the program the video was stopped because the map had been attached to the wall crookedly. The American director ... had been trained in a cultural system in which geometric regularity is valued, in which crookedness indicated carelessness, negligence, poor workmanship, and a lack of order. The Samoan crew, however, could not understand stopping the tape to straighten the map; to them it was not important that the map was hung crookedly. It did not alter the meaning and the usefulness of the map itself ...'

I used to believe that film was an 'international language', although I accepted that different directors developed different styles, and perhaps favoured different conventions. Even Metz (in *Film Language*, New York, 1974) seems to accept that film language is a kind of 'visual Esperanto'. 'In this concept of filmic Esperanto there is, all the same, some truth: it is in the second articulation that languages differ most radically, one from another, and that men fail to understand each other ... Thus we return to the idea that image discourse needs no translation, and that is because, having no second articu-

lation, it is already translated into all languages.'

I used to believe that a camera was quite free of cultural values. And although one talked about 'Western' film techniques, I would probably have agreed with Daniel Arion, when he writes in *The Grammar of the Film Language*: 'All the rules of film grammar have been on the screen for a long time. They are used by film-makers as far apart geographically and in style as Kurosawa in Japan, Bergman in Sweden, Fellini in Italy and Ray in India.'

How many people would accept this statement, particularly in the light of recently published studies of Japanese directors such as Ozu and Mizoguchi? If we don't accept it, can we say that there is something specifically *Japanese*, as opposed to something more vaguely 'oriental', or something merely personal in their work which distinguishes it, in formal terms, from the work of Hollywood directors? According to Robert Gessner (*The Moving Image*, London, 1968), 'Japanese directors are more inclined to pan and dolly from right to left, whereas Western directors generally go from left to right. Could the reading habits of centuries influence visual preferences as well as condition perception?'

What do we really mean by 'film language' or 'visual language'? Thorold Dickinson obviously detests the term. He traces the origins of the 'heresy' that described cinema as a language in his book *A Discovery of Cinema*. It was a heresy, he believes, to think of shooting a script according to set shot descriptions (long-shot, mid-shot, close-up) and of covering each set-up from four different angles. 'It was the French who first described cinema as a "langage". The heresy arose out of the mistranslation of the word as "language". The French word for language is "langue". "Langage" means speech, a way of speaking. "Le langage du cinéma" means a visual way of telling a story or making a statement: the phrase was never intended to lead to a study of grammar and syntax.'

He seems to be dismissing the French semiologists who have, apparently, misunderstood their own language! Likewise the

grammarians, such as Daniel Arion and Desmond Davis (*The Grammar of Television Production*). Arion has catalogued and analysed more variants of 'the rules' than anyone else. Dickinson (in Appendix I of his book) rejects more explicitly semiotic and structuralist methods, and his brief bibliography suggests a lack of awareness of linguistics, as well as the work of de Saussure, Metz, Barthes and Wollen. To be fair, Dickinson is very informative on the historical relationship between film technology and film form. Jean Rouch, when I asked his views on various Third World film-makers, used the phrase '*nouvelle langue*' in a rather different sense: 'Up until now I haven't discovered what the African film language is. It will come. There is an Indian film language, Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* is a good example. Brazil has its own film language: it appears in the Cinema Nôvo films. Japan has its own language too. Maybe there is an African film using a new language, but if so I haven't seen it. I see new stories, real African stories and so on, but not a "*nouvelle langue*". They want to develop their own style, and one day they will.' (*Educational Broadcasting International*, June 1978.)

Although each of the new national languages or styles, in Rouch's sense, strikes us as something fresh and exciting when we discover it for the first time, it is important to point out that foreigners seldom find it difficult to understand, at almost any level. Metz would seem to agree: 'A film is always more or less understandable. If by chance it is not at all understood, that is as a result of peculiar circumstances, and not of the semiological process proper to the cinema. Naturally the cryptic film, like cryptic utterance, the extraordinary film, like the extraordinary book, the film that is too rich or too new, can very well become unintelligible. But as "language" film is always grasped ... Even the dimmest spectator will have roughly understood.'

The signs *seem* accessible and meaningful, whatever the cultural distances involved. Of course some allusions are lost, some significant gestures or details are not perceived, but

Jean Rouch's Africa: 'Babatu'.



essentially each new 'language' is little more than a variation on an 'international' film language. We might be tempted to point to exceptions. The very literary conventions of Chinese ideological epics are rather remote, to this viewer at any rate, and the long, loosely constructed, theatrical Indian (or rather Hindi) popular movies with their idolised stars, spectacles, songs and dances do not appeal to our taste (though they go down well in most parts of Africa, as do the Hong Kong 'Kung Fu' movies).

But we should look at the other side of the coin. What elements do the Chinese, for instance, find alien in European films? Fortunately, their own critical writing helps us to see things from their point of view.

I propose to quote from the *People's Daily* commentary (1974) on Antonioni's film at some length. Politics obviously comes into the matter, but the close textual analysis of the film is relevant to my argument. It is a pity we do not possess a similarly detailed review of the Joris Ivens films, which met with much approval—not just for structural reasons, one may assume. After rebuking Antonioni for his betrayal of friendship, the Chinese commentator writes: 'We will thoroughly expose and criticise this film's counter-revolutionary nature...'

He attacks the structure and composition of the film: 'Shutting his eyes to the large numbers of big modern enterprises, the

director concentrated on assembling unconnected scenes of poorly-equipped hand-operated enterprises... There is a boring succession of shots of fragmented plots, lonely old people, exhausted draught animals and dilapidated houses... The film resorts to all manner of trickery to deny the fact that the life of the Chinese people has markedly improved... In order to defame the Chinese people, he racked his brains to present in a grotesque way various expressions of people sitting in tea houses and restaurants, pulling carts and strolling in streets... Not a new lathe, a tractor, a decent looking school, a construction site seething with enthusiasm, or a scene of good harvest is seen in the film. But he took full shots and close-ups of what he considered as useful for slandering China and the Chinese people and did not think them lengthy.

'In photographing the Yangtze River Bridge at Nanking, the camera was intentionally turned on this magnificent modern bridge from very bad angles in order to make it appear crooked and tottering. A shot of trousers hanging to dry below the bridge is thrown in to mock the scene...'

'In so far as montage is concerned, the film seems to be a jumble of desultory shots placed together at random, but in fact all are arranged for a vicious purpose... The use of light and colour in the film is likewise ill-intentioned. It is shot mainly in a grey, dim

light and chilling tones. The Whangpoo River appears as if enveloped in smog. Streets in Peking are painted in a dreary colour. Mountain villages in Linsien County are hidden in dark shadows. All in all, there are many scenes which give the audience a forlorn, gloomy, melancholy and sombre impression...'

'That Antonioni is hostile to the Chinese people can also be proved by the way he shot his scenes in China. He openly boasts in the film's narration of how he took sneak shots of many scenes like a spy... He complains that "it was difficult to move with a film camera" in Chienmen Street. What's difficult? It is difficult to be a thief. He even asked people to fake a fist-fight scene at the China-Albania Friendship People's Commune in Peking... On another occasion he asked people to change their clothes to suit his purpose, otherwise he would not photograph them. His trickery in taking sneak shots, forcibly taking shots against people's wishes and fabricating scenes is in itself grave contemptuous disrespect towards the Chinese people...'

These extracts are very revealing. Quite apart from the question of the film's content, it is clear that the Chinese are unfamiliar with the conventions and cinematic language of 'Western', neo-realistic, social documentary films. Antonioni's 'tricks' are standard practice by our norms—every week our TV screens expose aspects of our societies in the same way—but we should not assume that they are internationally accepted. The comments about Antonioni's use of light and colour are worthy of study. Did the film seem deliberately dim and grey to the Chinese simply because the film-stocks, processing and printing systems they use (including the obsolete Technicolor dye-transfer system) tend to register the primary colours far more vividly, far less subtly (reinforced by their customary panoramic choreography of masses of smiling people in colourful costumes, as in the film of Haile Selassie's state visit to China)? The technology of film-stock production and processing is clearly not value-free if this is the case. On the other hand, perhaps Antonioni was developing a conscious metonymics of colour, less obvious and precise than in *The Red Desert* but meaningful, nevertheless.

According to the *Guidelines and Thesaurus* prepared by Brigham Young University Language and Intercultural Research Centre (Provo, Utah, 1976): 'A series of experiments was conducted in England with film-makers from various parts of the world. It was found that those people from further south preferred and used warmer colours and saw them as being more realistic colours, while those from further north preferred the cold colours and found them to be more normal or realistic colours.' No source is given. If this is true, then we would have expected the Chinese to have preferred the dull cold colours, and the Italians to have preferred the warmer colours. But we should not forget that Antonioni is a North Italian!

As Susan Sontag rightly remarks in *On Photography*, the attacks on the Antonioni film in the Chinese press 'make a negative catalogue of all the devices of modern photography, still and film.' Her observations are relevant to our discussion of the ways different cultures use camera technology and

Ousmane Sembene's Africa: 'Emtai'.



photographic imagery: 'While for us photography is intimately connected with discontinuous ways of seeing (the point is precisely to see the whole by means of the part—an arresting detail, a striking way of cropping) in China it is connected only with continuity. Not only are there proper subjects for the camera, those which are positive, inspirational (exemplary activities, smiling people, bright weather), and orderly, but there are proper ways of photographing, which derive from notions about the moral order of space that preclude the very idea of photographic seeing.'

The Chinese 'resist the photographic dismemberment of reality. Close-ups are not used. Even the postcards of antiquities and works of art sold in museums do not show part of something; the object is always photographed straight on, evenly lit, and in its entirety.' Whether these points are valid or not (and only someone like Jay Leyda, with substantial experience of Chinese cinema, could tell us), whether these are part of the 'characteristic taste of those at the first stage of camera culture' (can one really say this of the Chinese as one might of Worth and Adair's Navajo Indians?), they require investigation. We may, indeed, 'find the Chinese naive for not perceiving the beauty of the cracked peeling door, the picturesqueness of disorder, the force of the odd angle and the significant detail, the poetry of the turned back', as Ms Sontag asserts. But many British critics have also complained of the poverty of the images in our own routine TV social documentaries, with their clichéd shots of squalid, depressing buildings, misfits (tramps and alcoholics) etc.

Ultimately, we cannot read too much into the Chinese statements about Antonioni's film; perhaps we can even sympathise with their desire to project a positive image of their achievements (the Indians disliked Louis Malle's footage for similar reasons). Not every society wishes to have its dirty linen put on show, Watergate style, or on film.

The extracts from the *People's Daily* commentary serve to remind us that film language can influence cultural relations between countries; at this level alone, it is not as international as we may have thought. We are all guilty of using the term 'film language' loosely. Not everyone has read or understood Metz (or wants to!). To some the term would still signify the language spoken on the soundtrack; to others it means the general system of grammatical rules and visual punctuation devices; to others again it is a term used to describe the whole style of the film, in terms of iconography, cutting rhythm, use of signs and spatial relationships. It can refer to 'style', 'technique', 'idiom', 'set of conventions', and it can imply something personal, regional, national or international.

It is not within the scope of this article to take further the debate as to whether film is a language like any other language, subject to the same sort of rigorous analysis. In the opinion of James Roy MacBean, 'in itself, the question of whether film is a *langue* or a *langage* is an academic question', and Metz's semiology 'boils down to little more than a tedious taxonomy of the banal' presented with 'impenetrable arguments', 'convoluted ruminations', 'pedantry', and all the 'mumbo-jumbo of semiological jargon'. It is still not clear whether we can talk with any degree of

scientific accuracy about filmic or visual literacy. If not a heresy, it is at least confusing. It was easier to disentangle the muddle before the semiologists (semioticians) made an elaborate science of confusion. But they did discover a few useful flint tools during their digs; these tools will have to do, until we reach the iron age. We can at least scrape off the emulsion, even if we cannot reveal the deep structure underneath.

Peter Wollen recognised the problem early on: 'If the concept of "language" is to be used it must be used scientifically and not simply as a loose, though suggestive metaphor.' James Monaco, following Metz, pointed out that: 'The earliest film texts—even many published recently—pursue with shortsighted ardour the crude comparison of film and written/spoken language. The standard theory suggested that the shot was the word of the film, the scene its sentence, and the sequence its paragraph... the comparison... breaks down under analysis.' But Monaco, again explaining Metz, states that 'Any system of communication is a "language"; English, French or Chinese is a "language system". Cinema, therefore, may be a language of a sort, but it is not clearly a language system.' It is not perhaps important to come to an agreement as to whether film is like a language, or a language without a system. Metz himself does not insist: 'One can of course conclude that the cinema is not a language, or that it is so only in a sense that is altogether too figurative and, consequently, it should not be dealt with through semiotics.'

There are many who have come to that conclusion, like MacBean; but those who have persevered have usually found the effort worthwhile, like Monaco. Some semiotic approaches, applied in a cross-cultural context, are revealing. It is because visual images are interpreted in different ways in different cultures that we can agree with Monaco that 'images must be "read" ... There is a process of intellection occurring—not necessarily consciously—when we observe an image ...' As film draws on the other arts, and is a product of culture, it has resonances that go beyond its diegesis (the sum of what is denoted). The terminology seems unnecessarily obscure, but terms like 'syntagmatic' and 'paradigmatic', once understood, are useful for discussing the ways that editing decisions are made in different cultures (in terms of the syntactic relationship of shots) and the ways that film-makers choose to photograph a shot (e.g. high-angle or low-angle paradigms), as Monaco points out.

One book which is thought-provoking without being obscure is *Through Navajo Eyes* (1971), by Sol Worth and John Adair. Worth and Adair gave cameras to Navajo Indians and let them shoot what they (the Navajo) wanted to shoot, the way they saw it. In the first two chapters, the authors address themselves to many of the problems raised in this article: film language, and ways of structuring reality through film in different cultures. But fascinating as the study is, one cannot help thinking that the authors tended to see what they wanted to see in the resulting footage. Or was it what the technology constrained the Navajo to see? Or what their comparative lack of training and skill constrained them to record on film? They avoided face close-ups, for instance. Does one

accept the anthropological explanation that Navajos generally avoid eye-to-eye contact? Or does one remind oneself that few early film-makers used face close-ups, and that it's a common characteristic of beginners to be shy of the use of the close-up?

My grandmother, when she takes a still photograph, invariably stands about ten yards from the subject. When you see the photographs, the subjects are always in long shot and you can hardly see the faces... even though the face is what she was probably most interested in, in the first place, and the part of the image which she would have treasured and studied most closely over the years.

Worth and Adair think differently: 'The avoidance of looking at the eyes relates to values of privacy in Navajo culture, where close living and modesty taboos must be reconciled by some form of perceptual avoidance behaviour. It seems possible to conclude that this aspect has been carried over into film discourse ... It might be fruitful to consider research with the above reported method to test whether cultures seeking eye-to-eye contact would therefore use a large proportion of face close-ups.'

If the anthropological analysis is correct, then it would seem to imply that one should not attempt to train people from other cultures as film-makers—beyond giving them a few basic explanations about how to load a camera and to focus the lens. If you teach them anything more than that, you are liable to destroy their unique cultural perceptions by imposing a foreign film language, a far from 'neutral density' filter between their eyes and the slice of reality they are trying to capture on celluloid, the way they see it.

An interesting situation is described on pages 157–161 of *Through Navajo Eyes*. One of the Navajo film-makers, Mary Jane, is trying to shoot a sequence about a medicine man. Mary Jane was reluctant to film anything, but Sol Worth was anxious that a rare religious ceremony should be recorded. He broke research discipline by instructing Mary Jane what to shoot, telling her to film 'cut-aways'; at one point he took the camera and shot close-ups of the medicine man's face himself. Adair, the anthropologist, 'emphasised to Worth that his behaviour reflected a common attitude in many representatives of one culture teaching another. He felt that in this case, Worth was fulfilling a preacher's and also a teacher's role, and that although acting as a researcher he was unable to completely divorce himself from his own culture. Worth felt himself as a film-maker to be a representative of the "right" way of doing things, teaching those who were doing it "wrong".'

Clearly the close-up is still a good debating point. When did it emerge in the historical development of film language, and who used it first? Is the Navajo unwillingness to use facial close-ups related to the Chinese conventions of 'decorum in conduct and imagery' (Sontag), where candid shots and close-ups of loved ones are not to be found in home or office, even though there are plenty of snapshots of a formal posed type (the sort my grandmother tends to take). Or is it just that beginners in photography and film-making seem to avoid the big close-up universally? Could the phenomenon be attributable to 'the visual taste of those at the first stage of camera culture, when the image



Oriental visual languages or individual styles? Satyajit Ray's 'Pather Panchali'; the view from the tatami in Ozu's 'Late Autumn'.

is defined as something that can be stolen from its owner? I would argue that it is more to do with technology than anything else. Given a Box Brownie or an Instamatic camera with a pretty basic standard lens, the tendency is to take medium-shots (or medium long shots). Then one is sure of focus and depth of field.

At the other end of the spectrum from the Navajo amateurs are the masters of oriental film-making, people like Ray, Ozu, Mizoguchi. Are they using autochthonous or imported visual languages?

Certainly Ray was exposed to Western training and foreign influences, but that has not prevented him from developing an identifiable indigenous style (but by indigenous we really mean Bengali rather than all-Indian). Ray once gave the following response to a questionnaire: 'The most encouraging development in films in recent years has been the emergence, the recognition

by the West, of the Oriental School of film-making—exemplified by the Japanese cinema. In its present form (e.g. the films of Mizoguchi) it is almost wholly untouched by European conventions, yet is original and fundamental enough to necessitate a thorough reassessment of the so-called first principles of cinematography.' (R. Hughes, *Film: Book I*, 1959.)

So, far from there being an international language of cinema, an internationally agreed UN charter of conventions and grammatical rules, we are liable to be presented, quite suddenly, with a new national school of film-making, which may be 'almost wholly untouched by European conventions' and will require us to go back to square one in thinking about the principles and language of cinematography. One year it may be Brazilian cinema, the next it might be Cuban, or Australian, or Ethiopian... or it may be more local... it may be Bengali or Wolof... Navajo or Inuit (Eskimo).

There can be few film-makers who succeed in having their films distributed internationally who have not been touched by a whole variety of foreign conventions; but in a closed society which imports very little foreign material some may still emerge. On the whole, I am sceptical about 'schools' as I am about the structural or formal elements in a film which are national or even ethnic (in the sense that one is tempted to talk about them as specifically African, Japanese or Indian).

In an excellent essay, 'Calm Without, Fire Within' (in *Our Films, Their Films*, 1976), Ray points out that it is easier to analyse national traits in the other visual arts. Chinese calligraphy has its own conventions which can be discussed with some confidence. 'When we come to films, the pinning down of national traits becomes more difficult. For one thing, the distinguishing mark of the tool is absent. The brush and the burin have given way to the more impersonal and mechanical movie camera whose lenses are found to behave in a very occidental fashion, recording perspective and shadows in defiance of ageless precepts of Oriental Art. A landscape-with-figures in a Japanese movie—if one ignores the kimonos, the bamboo shoots and what not—is more likely to be found to obey the compositional canons of Western academic art than those of the East—and rightly, too.'

Ray goes on to describe where one should look for the specifically Eastern traits. At this point I want to look more closely at his remarks about camera lenses behaving 'in a very occidental fashion'. This remark takes us right back to the quotation which appears at the head of this article. Does the camera impose on the user 'Western' aesthetic and perceptual codes?

If camera technology does influence visual language and style of expression, then presumably different types of camera will be responsible for different styles. On one level this is obvious and easy to demonstrate. A camera equipped with a 400 foot magazine and a battery-driven motor immediately allows the film-maker to shoot long takes of about eleven minutes, if he so wishes. This freedom is exploited by many 'direct cinema' film-makers. A clockwork camera with a 25 second run and a 100 foot spool of film obviously imposes a faster cutting rhythm even in a culture where audiences might prefer a slower rhythm and longer takes. It couldn't have taken film-makers (whatever their nationality) very long to discover that if one had to start a new shot every 25 seconds or sooner, it looked a lot smoother on the screen if one cut on action and changed the shot or angle between shots, rather than if one started up again from exactly the same position. This is the way in which the basic rules tended to develop—common sense from a common kinaesthetic experience, rather than from semiological considerations. In the same way, the standard TV studio facilities impose on the producer certain stereotyped formats as developed in the West (e.g. presenter + captions + telecine insert).

In Ethiopia one can clearly trace the influence of technology (or lack of certain items) on both content and format. For a number of years the donors would not supply a VTR to the Mass Media Centre. Even when one became available, it was not possible to edit, so all programmes were recorded in real time, from top to bottom. The original

consultants had included an Arriflex camera on the equipment list, but in fact a sound camera was never available, so nearly all programmes were studio-bound (and consequently out of touch—visually—with social reality). Only the occasional photo-caption or mute film sequence (negative film electronically reversed) made the audience aware of non-studio space. All programmes were heavily dependent on the presenters, and simple captions (there was rarely an attempt to build or decorate a set, as there were few flats or units). One could argue that these were financial as much as technological constraints. But the limited budgets were not as frustrating to the producer as the fact that, if a mistake occurred during recording, he had to start again from the beginning, or accept bad cuts and bad acting. After the third or fourth try, he would accept the recording in despair: he had probably overrun his studio booking.

Clearly the incompleteness of the technology caused great strains on the crew. However, lack of VTR editing is something that most TV producers around the world experienced in the early days. Some preferred the excitement of the live show, and in fact Katz and Wedell in *Broadcasting in the Third World* (London, 1978) argue that live TV 'encouraged creativity and cultural authenticity' in countries like Brazil and Thailand. They make the point that VTR and telecine equipment opened the floodgates for the importation of foreign material. Be that as it may, producers everywhere like to shape their material, and if they cannot edit they cannot be in complete artistic control. In Ethiopia, a bigger problem was the lack of proper camera dollies; the combination of untrackable tripods on wheels with a rough floor had serious consequences for visual language. The three static cameras could be zoomed in or out, but precious little else. As already mentioned, a sound film camera was unavailable, thus depriving the children watching schools TV of any knowledge of the development needs of the rural population.

I would argue that even such minor features as the design of a shoulder brace, or the position of the viewfinder and eyepiece, can have a significant influence on film language. When Jean Rouch was involved in the development of the portable Eclair camera, it was a two-way process: film-maker influences technology, then technology influences other film-makers.

I suppose that it is possible to talk of a national style or film language if a sufficient number of film-makers suddenly start making films in more or less the same way as a result of a new development in equipment design. The development of the Eclair camera resulted in a new French filmic dialect which quickly spread round the world. Independent but parallel developments in North America also contributed to the rapid 'internationalisation' of *cinéma vérité* and 'direct cinema' techniques. But for a dissenting view, from a semiological perspective, see Annette Kuhn's article 'The Camera I, Observations on Documentary' in *Screen* (Summer 1978). She criticises the 'movement away from texts and spectator-text relationships back towards the conditions of film production, a concern which is voiced in a degree of technological determinism, so that the technical features of documentary film-making are, if only because

little else is discussed, elevated to the status of defining features not only of the film-making practice but also of film texts.' She in fact goes on to quote a typical Rouch statement about the development of light, portable equipment that made his type of film-making popular. Later she argues that a different viewpoint is more valid, 'that certain types of equipment were developed and marketed expressly to make a specific type of film-making possible and that therefore the technological developments were themselves not innocent of historical/ideological over-determination.'

The article is provocative, and her point is valid for certain categories of equipment, but not I feel for the development of the Eclair. It may be valid in relation to the Indian adaptation of the half-inch videotape recorder for broadcasting purposes during the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) or, closer to home, the design of the 'Trigger Happy' unit (to specs by John Hopkins and Sue Hall of Fantasy Factory) which facilitates $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cassette videotape editing, halves community editing time and makes $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch video a viable low-cost documentary production format for the first time. The development of the portable videotape recorder and camera has brought with it a new aesthetic; or perhaps one should talk, at this stage, of new aesthetic possibilities. The characteristics of the tool, the possibility of twenty minute takes (with the Sony Umatic colour portable), the instant replay facility and the extremely light weight of the camera are all features which affect the way in which users encode their messages.

The Navajo Indians, whose ultimately amateurish 16mm films were analysed by Worth and Adair, would have been happier and much more confident with video. And I suspect that we should have seen more face close-ups of their elders, simply because the temptation to zoom in to a big close-up is much stronger with an electronic camera with its miniature-TV-screen viewfinder than the temptation for a beginner with a three-lens turret on his clockwork camera to change the lens and to focus for a close-up. Even the Chinese may surprise Ms Sontag with a sudden plethora of candid close-ups.

With the spread of video, we could start seeing an infinite variety of views of the world, because it is so easy to use. Ethnic minority groups, as well as children and others, will use it more and more frequently ... but have we considered that it is manufactured in the Orient? Is it true that the more we use Japanese cameras, 'the less we can say we are communicating with our own people'? Are those lenses from the Far East really going to behave in an oriental fashion, regardless of what we point them at, and in defiance of the precepts of Blake and Turner? In which case, let's hurry up and design an English camera, with English components, English lenses, with a camera brace that fits snugly on our broad shoulders and beer-paunches—just to think that we may have made wartime propaganda films with cameras designed by the enemy ... no wonder so many were counter-productive.

We have suggested how, on one level, the technology (and in some cases the lack of essential items) is partly responsible for dictating certain parameters of film style, but we have not developed any tools for precise

analysis of national traits, beyond a cautious nod in the direction of semiology.

Ray, in his article 'Calm Without, Fire Within', goes on to talk about the Japanese use of light 'used as a brush is by the painter', the thorough and disciplined acting, the sustained sense of pace, whether slow-moving or full of action and movement, but it is only when one gets down to close textual and structural analysis of film sequences, as Thompson, Bordwell and Branigan have done with Ozu's work (*Screen*, Summer 1976), that one begins to understand the way his film language differs from the standard Hollywood model. Yet such analysis tells us only about Ozu; it does not offer us valid generalisations about a Japanese film language. In another issue of *Screen* (Spring 1978), Paul Willemen quotes an article by J. L. Anderson which does in fact claim that Ozu's style and use of spatial structures was similar to that of other Japanese directors 'of the Shochiku studio of the period. Shimazu, a contemporary of Ozu at Shochiku, used a similar spatial style ... Inagaki and Ozu are dissimilar directors whose work converges only in regard to this use of space. This technique can be seen not only in the work of filmmakers but also in scroll paintings, kabuki theatre and even music.'

For the time being, pending further research, I still withdraw to my original position that all we can really talk about is the style of an individual director. We are clutching at straws if we really hope to pin down national visual styles. For a naive and misguided presentation of cross-cultural analysis of this type (which nevertheless contains some interesting ideas) see the Brigham Young University 'Guidelines and Thesaurus for solving cross-cultural mis-cues and missed-cues' (1976), especially the sections on colours and media conventions. Note for instance the comment on the use of jump-cuts in editing. 'These are used in France, Russia and the United States to show accelerated time' (*sic*).

Whatever our nationality, we would probably sympathise with what Ray said in 1948 in an article called 'What is Wrong with Indian Films?' 'What our cinema needs above everything else is a style, an idiom, a sort of iconography of cinema, which would be uniquely and recognisably Indian.' Ray has often talked of the fundamental 'Indianness' of Indian art, in the same way that Nikolaus Pevsner and others have talked of the 'Englishness' of English art.

Rouch claims that African film-makers are searching, as Ray was in India, but that they have not yet found a unique and recognisable idiom or 'langue', although they want to. Rouch does claim, however, that West African audiences are particularly sensitive to the rhythm of editing: 'They learn to read a film. That's why it's very embarrassing to make an action film now. They've seen all the Westerns, and they know what action means ... I discovered that in good American films when there is a contest or fight, the rhythm of the contest is the rhythm of music. You would hear the people in the audience going "Ugh ... ugh ... ugh-huh ... ugh ... ugh ... ughghgh ..." That's the rhythm of the film, and it's the rhythm of editing. In the French cinema, people were fighting and it was "uh ... uh ... uh ... uh"; it was not synchronous, it was not the right rhythm. I discovered that West Africans are

absolutely and definitely sensitive to the rhythm of editing, even unconsciously.' (EBI, June 1978.)

In West Africa Professor Opubor, Dr. Nwuneli and Dr. Oreh discussed the question of the existence of specifically African or black aesthetics in a paper for a 1977 seminar on 'The Nigerian Film Industry and National Cultural Identity'. The desire for identity is strong but the case for such an aesthetic is not proven because there is 'no uniform or stereotype form for it'. They talk of *black* aesthetics rather than Nigerian, Senegalese or Ethiopian aesthetics. Although colonial borders may not be as important as tribal ones, can one generalise? Could one talk of 'white aesthetics'?

Professor Opubor and his colleagues write, 'It is only when we know that "black aesthetics", black values, tastes, norms, and the culture are different from the Caucasians that we can decide on the necessity and desirability, or otherwise, of bringing these to the cinema.' Clearly one could make a comparative study of Hausa aesthetics compared to, say, Yoruba aesthetics. One could even study Hausa aesthetics in relation to Islamic aesthetics. But can one make a study of Hausa aesthetics in relation to a generalised concept of black, or African, aesthetics? At a time when we are all becoming more and more aware of the rich diversity of aesthetic and artistic tradition in Africa, it is strange that these learned professors should be promoting the idea of black or pan-African aesthetics (a persistent strain of anglophone 'negritude'?).

Even Paulin Vieyra, film-maker and author of a number of books on African cinema (including a study of Sembène Ousmane), propagates this misleading generalisation: 'The African sensitivity is entirely different from the European or American sensitivity. We have a view of things that is completely different from that of the West. Each person sees things according to his own background and culture. The world in which the African film-maker lives gives him a vision of Africa which is not exotic, not foreign, but uniquely "African" in cultural content.' (*Topic*, No. 70. USIS, Washington DC.)

In Britain we are more open, it seems, to see ourselves as foreigners see us. In fact most of us would accept the British films of directors like Cavalcanti, Polanski or Losey, and certainly those of Reisz, as more British in spirit than many films by native-born directors who ape the Hollywood or French *nouvelle vague* models.

It seems that only cross-cultural semioticians and structuralists—Propps who can study the morphology of films as well as folktales—will be able to help. But even if they deconstruct the texts of all my African film footage, and try to read the films I shot and edited frame by frame, I defy them to be able to say: 'This shot was composed according to Caucasian or English aesthetic principles, this shot was directed by an African, this sequence was cut according to Western criteria, with the slow pace of a filmmaker from Wessex.' As with images, so with form and structure, we see what we look for, or what we want to see.

If we cannot be as precise as we would like in identifying all the aesthetic/formal considerations and cultural paradigms involved in the *production* of signs in the motion picture media, we can at least evaluate the



In Ethiopia: a clockwork camera with three-lens turret. In Kenya: a Dutch consultant demonstrates the electronic camera and video recorder

effect of the film or programme on the audience with reasonable precision—we can assess the interpretation of the motion picture text, using techniques borrowed from semantics and communication studies.

Most organisations in the West which export films for reasons of cultural or technical co-operation, or for profit, assume that the visual language is more or less universally understood, in the same way as speech is understood within a given linguistic community. To quote F. de Saussure's 'Course in General Linguistics': 'Among all the individuals that are linked together by speech, some sort of average will be set up: all will reproduce—not exactly of course, but approximately—the same signs united with the same concepts.' Film-making can be thought of as a form of universal speech, linking all individuals and communities, setting up its own average in terms of understanding and interpretation: but we know that the same signs are not united with the same concepts—rather the signs which are apparently the same are often associated with

different concepts in different cultures. Sometimes seeing a film or TV programme can be like hearing people speak a language we do not know. As de Saussure wrote: 'We perceive the sounds'—in this case the visual images—but remain outside the social fact, because we do not understand them.'

But I still prefer to think that film-making is a form of universal speech—not so much a 'Visual Esperanto' as a developing visual language with a rich variety of dialects and idiolects which contain both alien and indigenous elements. These elements must be studied more closely and be made more explicit if genuine intercultural communication is to take place.

One approach, which I intend to pursue myself, would involve a comparative study of codes, structures and other signifying practices in the motion picture and television media, in an attempt to discover similarities and differences along national, cultural, regional, tribal and ethnic lines: to see whether it is possible to identify specific or unique formal/morphological traits.

Research design: having established a network of co-operating film schools in various parts of the world, identical amounts of film stock and identical scripts (with strictly non-cultural content) would be supplied to sufficient students in each country (selected to represent different regions and ethnic groups *within* each country) to obtain enough sample films (shot and edited by individuals, not teams) for an exercise in comparative semiotics.

Although drawing on the methodology of previous research to some extent (e.g. that of Worth and Adair), this study would be based on the assumption that the film-makers are *not* complete amateurs, with little previous exposure to the conventions of the commercial cinema. It would assume that *all* film-makers are influenced by foreign ideas to a lesser or greater extent, but that they still attempt to structure reality the way they see it, in an indigenous rather than deliberately foreign manner. Regardless of 'influences' or the communication constraints of imported technology, it is assumed that cultures create their own codes, and modify the film and TV media to suit their own psychological, social and aesthetic patterns.

It is assumed, therefore, that every film student who participates in this cross-cultural film language study is able to operate a 16mm camera and to edit mute film. Each participating student will receive a script for, let us say, a five minute film, as well as 400 feet of film stock. The student will have his own film processed locally and edited to a length of approximately 200 feet. Possible participating film schools might include the KIMC, Nairobi; Poona, India; British Council Media Department, London; Lodz, Poland. Schools in, say, China, Japan, Sweden, France and Brazil would be included if possible, to ensure a sufficiently wide sample of different cultures.

I also propose to make a compilation film which would juxtapose extracts from the work of the directors and films mentioned in this paper. By presenting short samples of the film language of directors from different cultures in close proximity, it should be possible to make more accurate comparisons than is possible by referring to still pictures in books.

A BULLET IN THE HEAD | VIETNAM REMEMBERED

John Pym

As an example of his craft, the apolitical television cameraman in Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* pinned to a wall in his Chicago apartment a blown-up print of the most famous news picture of 1968 (the film was set in the summer of that year). Taken from a live sequence filmed in Saigon during the Tet Offensive, the photograph shows a young man in a checked shirt standing in a street with his arms tied behind his back; the city's chief of police has just shot him in the head at point-blank range with a small pistol. Although other isolated photographs of the Vietnam War have lodged themselves in the collective memory of the West—the flaming body of a Buddhist monk, the huddled victims of My Lai, the napalmed girl running naked down a highway—none combined with quite such immediacy both the commonplace brutality of war in general and the illusion of larger-than-life 'accessibility', to those not actually in the field, of the Vietnam War in particular.

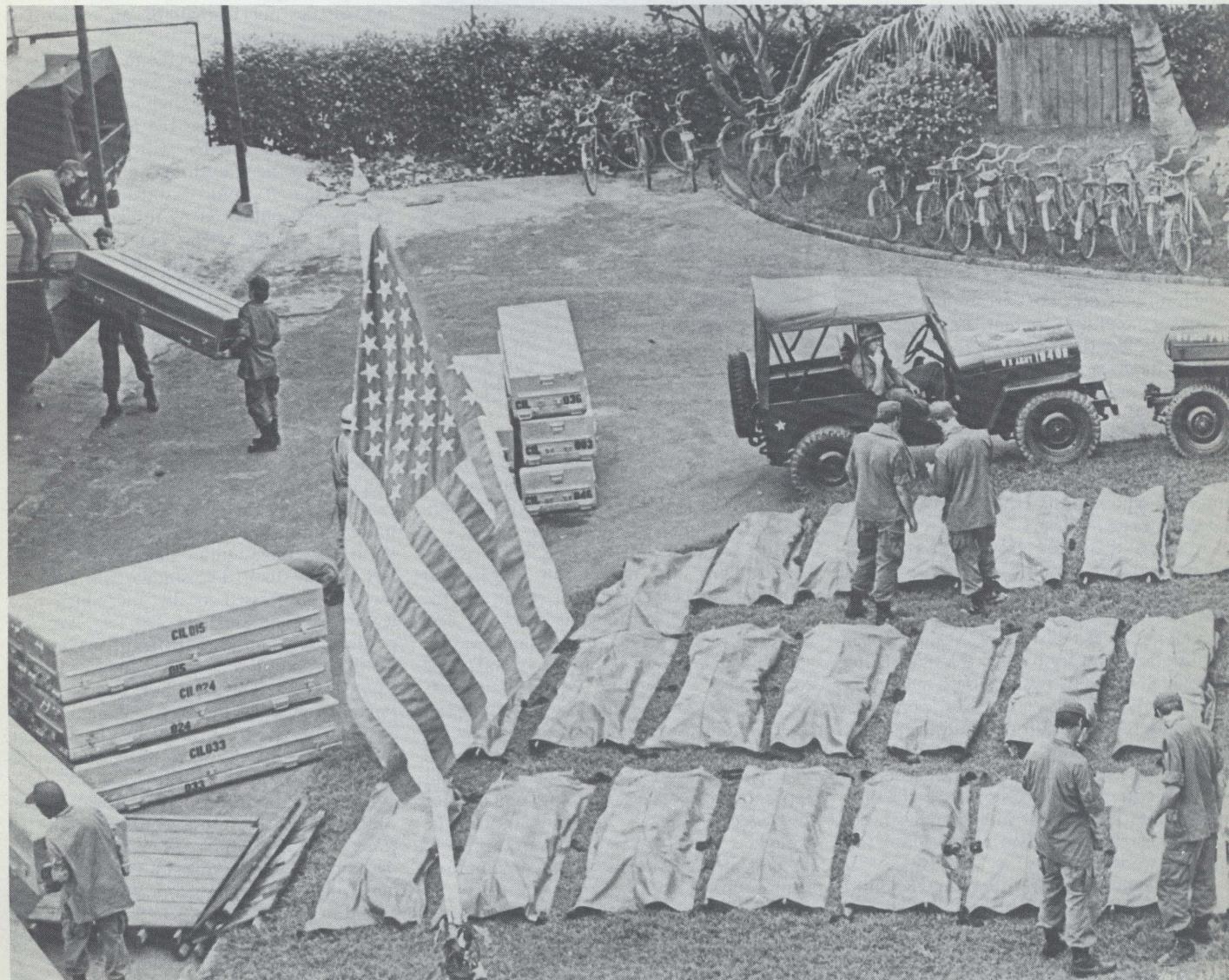
Hollywood's reluctance to finance Vietnam movies in the 60s and early 70s was due mainly to the virtual impossibility of finding

viable scripts dealing with a widely unpopular war, and one which was, significantly, still to be decided. Later, some of the standard

methods of fictionalising war (and combat in particular) were called into question by the fact that for a decade the actuality of a high-technology war was regularly seen by millions of Americans whose first act on returning home from work was to switch on the television for the early evening news. The films of the period which most effectively treated Vietnam either did so obliquely, like *Medium Cool* (1968), or were, like Aldrich's *Ulzana's Raid* (1972), ostensibly about something else altogether. The hazards of a direct approach were demonstrated by the poor box-office performance of one film in particular, *The Green Berets* (1968), starring and co-directed by John Wayne, a naïve and sentimental attempt to justify the American presence in Vietnam with little more than special pleading and an appeal to uncomplicated patriotism. (The lessons of this approach have still not been fully absorbed. Two recent, vaguely anti-war films, for instance, Ted Post's *Go Tell the Spartans* and Sidney Furie's *The Boys in Company C*, both 1977, failed largely because neither seemed capable of extricating itself from the tattered conventions of the beleaguered patrol picture.)

It was, however, a British film made in 1969, Peter Brook's *Tell Me Lies*, based on his considerably more trenchant stage production *US*, which highlighted perhaps more clearly than any American film the difficulties faced by the major American production

'The Deer Hunter'



companies in trying to find a point of view towards what seemed an interminable national nightmare. (It should be noted, though, that these were difficulties which, while the war was being fought, the majors rapidly gave up even trying to resolve.) *Tell Me Lies* follows a young couple in London who are searching for a means of doing something about the Vietnam War, the 'reality' of which has been brought home to them by photographs of a maimed child. The film, if memory serves, was a grab-bag of 60s discontents—Stokley Carmichael appears at one point to prophesy the demise of the white race—and seemed, despite the several opinions voiced by an array of artists, politicians and 'activists', incapable of formulating any coherent thesis on the reasons for the war, or of endorsing any clear line of resistance to it. Its most powerful sequence, ironically, was the re-enactment of a supremely negative gesture, the 'political' suicide in Washington of the Quaker Norman Morrison. If an anti-Hollywood movie could not organise its thoughts on the war, what chance had Hollywood?

Since the end of the war, the initial difficulties faced by mainstream American film-makers have been complicated by the realisation that for commercial reasons—and since it would be folly to ignore the subject of the decade—some sort of synthesis had to be reached about a war that remained both unreal and, in fictional cinematic terms, virtually unaccounted for. Despite saturation coverage by the media, Vietnam was an almost wholly unreal country. Its geography was familiar enough in outline at least, having been seen night after night behind the heads of Walter Cronkite and Chet Huntley. But apart from their names, there was little nation-wide familiarity with the country's cities, towns and provinces and the war produced few set-piece battles which could be fixed in the public mind. (Places in Vietnam movies, which have usually been shot in Thailand or the Philippines, are invariably indicated by road signs; and no one has yet attempted to recreate the ruins of Hue.) Vietnam's history and culture were, to most Americans, a conundrum.

What cinematic documentary footage there was—as opposed to the television reports—also seemed more than faintly unreal. The polemical documentary *Inside North Vietnam*, to take a single example, compiled in 1967 by Felix Greene, was designed especially to show the effects of the United States bombing of the North. But the mud, irrationally, seemed too red, the landscape a too brilliant emerald green. To hear, in a safe, suburban American movie-theatre, a Vietnamese doctor calmly describe the destruction of his hospital, and to see the effects of splinter-bombs on human beings so matter-of-factly presented, was in effect—and again irrationally—to distance the war still further.

Several recent American movies, however, have begun the task of squaring up to Vietnam, and—with Francis Ford Coppola's expensive and long delayed *Apocalypse Now* still to come—several more can be expected in the future. The consensus during the war was an ever-escalating disillusion and a widespread disgust with politicians and all their works. Lyndon Johnson, for example, was never more popular than on the night he



'The Deer Hunter': Robert De Niro, John Cazale

announced the end of the bombing of the North and that he would not be seeking re-election. The disgust with politicians, subsequently exacerbated by Watergate and its aftermath, surfaced in films like Aldrich's *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1977), with Burt Lancaster's Air Force general about to unleash the Third World War unless the 'facts' of Vietnam were published without equivocation. This disillusion has recently found an outlet in the latest of the crop of films belonging to what may loosely be described as the 'returned veteran' cycle.

Among the more intriguing at the low-budget end of this cycle has been Henry Jaglom's *Tracks* (1976), a hard-edged though ultimately flawed study of the psychological disintegration of an army sergeant (Dennis Hopper) who believes himself to be escorting the body of a comrade killed in Vietnam to a hero's home-town burial. The film neatly catches that flaky sense of a man suddenly thrust back into what the journalist Michael Herr describes simply as 'the World' (everything that lies outside Vietnam, and in this case a claustrophobic train travelling across America), as well as the man's fractured, haunted attempts to come to terms with normality, with people not concerned solely with killing and staying alive, but with picking up girls, chess problems and baseball statistics. The film falls down, however, at the moment it attempts to draw a conclusion, by its peremptory move to make the sergeant—if only perhaps in his own mind—an avenging angel. When nobody turns up for the funeral, he jumps into the grave, opens the seemingly empty coffin, decks himself in combat fatigues and emerges, armed, with the promise to bring Vietnam 'home'.

On the other hand, two big-budget pictures of 1978, Hal Ashby's *Coming Home* and Karel Reisz's *Dog Soldiers* (both, together

with *Tracks*, reviewed in earlier issues of SIGHT AND SOUND), set out not so much to draw conclusions as to deflect attention from the war itself: the former, a triangular story of the effects of the unseen war on a sergeant, a Marine officer and the officer's wife, to demonstrate the possibility of regeneration through love and forgiveness; and the latter, a chase movie with heavily symbolic overtones (two kilos of heroin are smuggled into the United States, and the 'poison' of Vietnam is quite literally brought home), to demonstrate the possibility of regeneration once the plot's luckless hero and heroine have been made to pass through a violently 'purifying' firefight.

Not, however, until *The Deer Hunter* (1978), directed by Michael Cimino, did any American film-maker achieve a satisfying synthesis of what 'Vietnam', *in extremis*, meant to the soldiers who fought there and what it represented, in more abstract terms, as a blow to the American body politic. Unlike *Dog Soldiers*, which lost itself in a confused, savage but almost jokey tone, and unlike *Coming Home*, which essayed a tone of sincere if not perhaps ultimately winning innocence, Cimino's film—more than three hours long, and laid out with solid narrative conviction—has banked its appeal on the assurance of an undiluted epic tone. Cimino, a Yale graduate, now in his late thirties, worked as a screenwriter before directing his first feature, Clint Eastwood's *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot* (1974). He cut his teeth in the film industry as a director of television commercials; and the lessons learned about making concise commercial points with a powerful emotional charge have been well applied in *The Deer Hunter*. Time and again, his film throws up emblematic images as

compelling, in their own way, as that classic photograph of the summary street execution in Saigon.

The strength of *The Deer Hunter* as an American populist movie derives largely from the success with which Cimino has adapted a single image to represent the post-war consensus about American involvement in Vietnam: the spectre of an American soldier putting a bullet in his brains, at first under compulsion and then voluntarily, for—at base—the sake of his country's honour. Where *The Deer Hunter* differs from previous attempts by American film-makers to put the war, and its aftermath, into perspective is in Cimino's decision not to load the script with any recriminatory or overtly political arguments. The legal and moral issues, now largely matters for historians, and in any case never matters weighed by the characters in the film, or by most of the men who actually fought the war, are never broached. It may be added, in passing, that to the majority of Western film-goers under 20 the Vietnam War is already almost as remote from their experience as the Korean War was to the draftees of the 60s. The film operates on a wholly emotional level—and in its harrowing middle section on an almost wholly visceral one—and yet it also manages to describe with tremendous conviction the unconscious 'education' of one, ordinary man who, having been through the fire, emerges quietly but quite devastatingly changed. Furthermore, by firmly basing itself in a genuine though fictional American community, and by spending a large part of its running time on an examination of the personal lives of a group of unselfconscious and unself-doubting friends, *The Deer Hunter* also manages, finally, to celebrate the American dream.

Although its scope is broad and its concentration on the exactitude of detail and location absorbingly accurate, the film remains at heart remarkably straightforward. It focuses on the at times almost imperceptible development of its protagonist, Michael Vronsky, an intrepid but easily likeable young man from a tight Russian Orthodox community in the steel town of Clairton, Pennsylvania. Some time in the late 60s (the landmarks of the outside world hardly impinge on the film's world), Michael, played with restrained assurance by Robert De Niro, and his friends Nick (Christopher Walken) and Steven (John Savage), the latter having just been married to the pregnant Angela, are drawn enthusiastically to the colours and sent to Vietnam.

The first third of the film establishes in economic detail the context of Michael's life: the foundry floor on which he works; his relationship with Nick, with whom he shares a prefabricated bungalow and whose girl, Linda (Meryl Streep), he eyes longingly from afar; with the younger Steven; and with three secondary characters, Stan (John Cazale), a vain, uncertain womaniser and the butt of the group's jokes, the immense monosyllabic Axel (played by a non-professional, Chuck Aspegren), and John (George Dzundza), the owner of the bar in which the friends' social life appears to centre. Steven's wedding and the rumbustious reception that follows reveal the close texture of Clairton's patriotic Russian Orthodox community, and also underline the sense of 'America' as an ideal, a country which succoured this particular

group of harried outsiders, provided them with the rough means to make a living and at the same time respected their cultural traditions. Michael is, by his own lights, in paradise.

In Vietnam, however, things are very different. The first third of the film—which has hinted at the coming storm (a rumbling diesel tanker thunders through Clairton at dawn; a drop of wine spills fatefully on Angela's wedding dress)—is shot in an expansive, exuberant style; the sound of the cathedral choir at Steven's wedding subsequently echoes in the mountains where, just before his departure, Michael goes to shoot one last deer. The cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond has described how the stock for the Vietnam sequences of the film (which were shot in Thailand)* was deliberately weathered in the printing to give the impression of actuality footage.

This feeling of the 'tone' of the war is further enhanced by the fast cutting and close-in shooting style of this section of the film. Furthermore, Cimino employs a brand of cinematic realism, conceived in the 60s and developed in the 70s, which virtually leaves nothing to the imagination: Michael and his friends are captured (after an abrupt cut from a quiet moment in John's bar to a Vietnamese village in the middle of a firefight), held in a bamboo cage which is submerged in a river under a pontoon shack, and then unceremoniously pulled out and forced to play Russian roulette while their captors lay bets on their survival. The 'realism' in this, and subsequent games of Russian roulette, is used with great skill: the camera rests only briefly on the falling bodies with blood spurting from their heads, but Cimino plays powerfully upon our expectation of these moments. His violence is never gratuitous: it is a public event and we should see it. On the other hand, and to jump forward slightly, the bedroom scenes between Michael and Linda on his return from Vietnam are essentially private moments, and are consequently handled—considering what is now 'permissible' in the commercial cinema—with an altogether refreshing restraint.

Thanks to Michael's determination to survive and his hunter's self-control, the three friends contrive to escape; they float down river and Nick is picked up by a helicopter; Michael and Steven, however, drop back into the water from the helicopter's runners. Michael subsequently carries Steven, whose legs are broken, through the jungle and on to Interstate 9 (one of those lost Vietnamese 'landmarks' in the American collective memory); and despite crowds of refugees, manages to find Steven a refuge on the bonnet of a South Vietnamese Army jeep. Nick is later discharged from hospital in Saigon. Still in a state of shock, he tries but seems to lose the will to telephone Linda (who had caught Angela's bridal bouquet and accepted Nick's proposal of marriage); in the Mississippi saloon, decked with go-go girls and wagon wheels, he allows himself to be picked-up by a bar-girl; the squalor of the girl's room, however, and the presence of her baby, drives Nick on to the street. He hears single pistol shots, sees bodies being carried from the back of a darkened house and

suddenly finds himself lured into a crowded room where two Vietnamese with red headbands are playing a voluntary game of Russian roulette: the gamblers this time are frenzied men in city suits rather than jungle fatigues. Reminded of the past, Nick loses his self-control, seizes the pistol and fires an empty chamber into his own head. The game (which, in the film's one moment of unresolved ambiguity, is also being watched by Michael) breaks up in confusion; Nick departs in company with Julien, the 'game's' sinister French fixer.

Despite the horrifying and compelling visual pyrotechnics of its middle section, *The Deer Hunter* truly comes into its own as a portrait of Michael in its concluding section. Several unifying motifs run through the film. One is the omnipresence of beer and liquor (symbols perhaps of profligate capitalism): from the Rolling Rock beer of the reception; to the cans of Miller's on the table where the prisoners are forced to play Russian roulette; through the single cases of spirits being pedalled down Interstate 9 and through the streets of Saigon; to the stacks of cases lining the walls of Saigon's gambling dens. The image of the inferno is another: repeated shots of the floor of the steel foundry in Clairton; the burning Vietnamese village; the smaller individual fires during the fall of Saigon. But perhaps the most potent image is the American eagle. It first crops up on the shoulder flash of the silent Green Beret who appears, like a spectre, at the wedding party; it is echoed later on Michael's own shoulder flashes (when he returns home, he is seldom out of uniform); and is picked up in the name of the supermarket, the Eagle, where Linda works. In the last section of the film, Cimino highlights both sides of this double-headed eagle (the symbol, too, of old Russia): the loving camaraderie of the Eagle supermarket at the heart of the community into which Michael is welcomed back; and the brutal, fragmented life of the armed forces at war, the desolation of Vietnam.

Michael Vronsky is a decent and honourable man, and also a modest and self-effacing one. But when he returns from Vietnam, he cannot bring himself to join the celebration organised by John, Stan, Axel and Linda. Instead he drives past the bungalow and spends the night at a motel: this is the film's turning point, as—in a beautifully realised sequence—Michael sits alone, gazing out at a dark Pennsylvania river, watching a boat, remembering Vietnam and that other river down which he and his friends floated to a kind of false safety. The sequence is accompanied by a plaintive theme played by the guitarist John Williams. Next morning, he goes to the bungalow and is welcomed by Linda, who is overjoyed to see him but at the same time worried and wounded by the fact that Nick has never written from Vietnam. She holds up Nick's half-finished pullover; it's too big for Michael. 'One of the things about wool,' she says bravely before breaking into tears, 'is that it's really a synch to fix.'

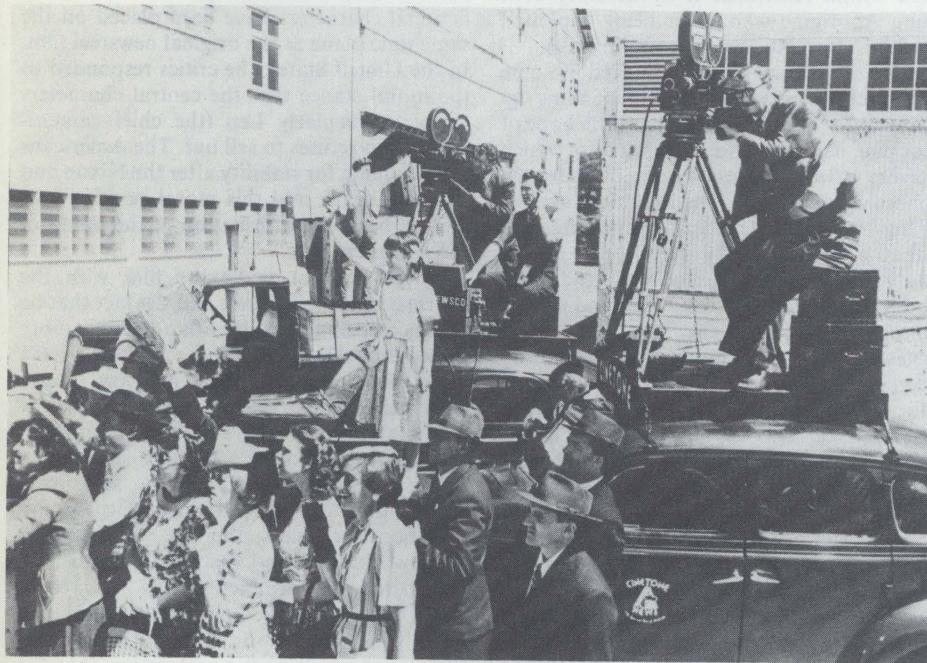
The fixing of Michael's own life is not so easily achieved. Cimino, however, treats his reintegration into the life of Clairton with delicate circumspection: Michael does not

* For a full description of the production of *The Deer Hunter* see *American Cinematographer*, October 1978.



'The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith'
Below: 'Newsfront'

TEST FOR AUSTRALIA



Robin Bromby

Australia is, without question, becoming a major producer of English language films. Sixteen films were screened at Cannes in 1978 and the National Film Theatre in London ran a season of 28 new productions two months later. For all this apparent success, the industry is suffering increasing dissension as Australian film-makers fail to agree on where they should be heading. Depending on whom one talks to, there are either predictions of disaster or near limitless optimism. Despite the problems, Australia will again have an impressive line-up of films at Cannes in May. The final list was not available at the time of writing, but audiences can again expect an interesting range of products. There will not, however, be the high-budget picture like 1978's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, nor does there seem to be a surprise in store of the *Newsfront* type.

The subjects of the new productions reveal that there has been a considerable shift of emphasis in the last year. The great commercial success of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* both in Australia and abroad has hung over the industry for the last few years; in the light of subsequent disasters which tried to tap the same nostalgic vein, there are many in the film industry who believe that this success was actually one of the worst things to happen to Australian film-making. It took a number of fingers getting burnt at the box-office to persuade film-makers that the nostalgia film could not be endlessly recycled. A prime example of this was Tom Jeffrey's *Weekend of Shadows*, which told the story of a small town's persecution of a Polish immigrant in the 1930s. The film was reasonably well reviewed, but disappeared after a two-week season in Melbourne. It was beautifully filmed and starred John Waters, Australia's leading sex symbol, but audiences had obviously had enough of seeing the outback represented in idealistic terms.

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith set a new record for Australian film budgets. It cost \$US1.2 million and it looks increasingly unlikely that it will manage to break out of the red. The biggest budget this year is just half that, for a screen adaptation by Michael Pate of the Colleen McCullough novel *Tim*. It stars Piper Laurie and is a love story of an older woman and a younger man. It cost \$US650,000.

The other films likely to be completed in time for Cannes have contemporary themes. Tim Burstall's *The Last of the Knucklemen* deals with violence in a mining town; *Cathy's Child* is about child abduction, which is a pressing social problem in Australia today, particularly among the migrant communities. Other films include *Dimboola*, a \$350,000 comedy which only slightly exaggerates the rough and tumble of an Ocker country wedding; *The Money Movers*, a high action film about an armoured car hold-up, directed by Bruce Beresford; *The Odd Angry Shot*, which follows an Australian commando unit in Vietnam; and *Snapshot*, a low-budget thriller in which a young fashion model is pursued by someone trying to kill her.

The man behind *Snapshot*, producer Antony Ginnane, represents one of the more extreme viewpoints in the Australian industry. 'There are a lot of film-makers in this country who have a vested interest in box-office figures not being made public. But the truth will come out, and I'm surprised that it hasn't come out sooner,' says Ginnane. This 29-year-old producer set off on his career with a \$50,000 soft-porn movie called *Fantasm*, quickly followed by *Fantasm Comes Again* and then *Patrick*, a psychic thriller. 'I have no faith in large-scale production,' Ginnane says. 'I could have made four pictures with the budget of *Jimmie Blacksmith*. The industry in Australia has gone the wrong way. The thrust has come from the creative people and not from the business side. I take a pessimistic view of the Australian film business. Its profit record is appalling. There is going to have to be a massive shaking up and a drastic decrease in the number of people making pictures.'

A survey taken last year showed that the top twenty grossing films from Australian

studios fell very much into the same category of picture box-office appeal as anywhere else in the world. The brash Australian product like *Alvin Purple*, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, *Stork* and *Alvin Rides Again* can usually be made with some certainty of profit. As Ginnane and others have shown, the sex film made on a low budget stands a good chance of bringing in substantial returns. In the field of so-called prestige film-making, the commercial track record is not so impressive. Yet money still seems to be flowing freely into new projects, much of it from the film corporations established by the various state governments. The corporations in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia have been particularly active. While producers realise that if it were not for these state bodies, and the federal government financed Australian Film Commission, many films would never have been made, the corporations have been criticised for insisting on what one critic called 'high culture films'.

Director Tim Burstall (*Alvin Purple*, *Eliza Fraser* and now *The Last of the Knucklemen*) has written that: 'Given the proliferation of State film-funding bodies . . . the pressure will be for films to fit in more and more with the safe and respectable values of the educated middle classes, and to reflect less and less the disruptive anarchic entertainment values of the cinemagoing public.' Burstall finds more encouragement in the fact that the major distributors and cinema chains have invested more than \$4 million in production with, so far, no sign of a let-up. Village-Roadshow, a major cinema operator, has been involved with some thirty projects.

The great productivity of the 1970s followed a long interruption in Australian feature film-making, and has so far survived the introduction of colour television (there are four channels in most of the main cities) and the effects of inflation on both production costs and exhibition expenses. Admission to the average Australian cinema now costs more than £2.

Film-making began in Australia in 1896, just a year after the world's first public screening in France. A French Pathé cameraman recorded the 1896 Melbourne Cup, then as now the country's greatest horse-racing event. Four years later, the Salvation Army produced a two-hour film, *Soldiers on the Cross*, which portrayed early Christian martyrs. But the first feature film as such told the story, not unexpectedly, of the legendary bandit Ned Kelly. Entitled *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), it was made by the Tait Brothers in Melbourne and ran for about an hour. It is thought to be the longest feature film to have been made anywhere in the world at the time.

By 1910 the industry had reached an output of fifteen features a year, most of the films concentrating heavily on the Australian landscape and many telling stories of bushrangers. Raymond Longford, though he had to face the problems of finding both backers and outlets for his films, made more than twenty silent films, including *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919), which is still considered an Australian classic. But in fact the years between 1910 and 1920 were productive for many directors and were not to be equalled again until the present decade.

In the 20s Australian cinemas became more closely tied to foreign distributors (mainly

British and American) and thus committed to buying a year's programme of these imported films. The local product was squeezed out. During the 30s Cinesound produced a number of low-budget comedies, while other features were made spasmodically over the years. Some of the best known films made in Australia had foreign capital (and, therefore, control), as in the case of *Bush Christmas* (1947), a children's film of timeless appeal, and Fred Zinnemann's *The Sundowners* (1960). In 1966 a film was made in Australia, again by a director from overseas, which was enough of a commercial success to encourage the local industry. Michael Powell's *They're a Weird Mob* exploited the situation in Australia at the time, with thousands of European migrants, mainly from Italy and Greece, flooding into the country. The humour of its view of the difficulties of a new migrant in coping with Australian life was heavy-handed, but the picture tore Australians away from their television sets. Local film-makers began to be back in business.

Of the film-makers who have emerged in the 70s, one of the more controversial is Fred Schepisi, who has made only two commercial features. The first, *The Devil's Playground* (1976), was a sensitive story of young Roman Catholic boys at a seminary and the priests under whose charge they lived. It was a first feature greeted with almost universal approval. Then came *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, which has been both hailed and hated within Australia. It is the story of a young Aborigine who, after being exploited by whites, turns to violence and revenge.

Schepisi has been bitterly attacked by some of his fellow countrymen for spending so much money on a film which has little hope of recouping its cost in Australia, and for which overseas sales have only been of marginal economic significance. The argument against the big-budget film (by Australian standards) is that a commercial failure could deal a deadly blow to the whole industry, and mean the drying up of both government and private capital. In fact, recent soundings have suggested that private capital is already becoming timid when it comes to features.

Producer/director Terry Bourke launched a stinging attack in a newspaper article entitled 'The Tall Poppies Fall'. He concentrated his attack on Schepisi, Burstall and Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*), accusing all three of 'hype' tactics and spending that could damage the industry's financial credibility. Now Schepisi and *Chant* are in full view, the P.R. cloud of London and Cannes has melted away. And what are we left with? Very little,' wrote Bourke. He attacked Schepisi for spending \$80,000 on pre-Cannes publicity, saying that it meant a lot of newspaper space but did not bring in many sales.

Schepisi was understandably annoyed. For one thing, he has \$200,000 of his own money, accumulated from years of slogging at making television commercials, riding on *Jimmie Blacksmith*. 'I live for the day when our films are compared with U.S. films, rather than the masterpieces of the world,' says Schepisi. 'In the United States they thought *Jimmie Blacksmith* cost \$6 million. There are a lot of hopes in the industry pinned on this film. If it falls flat on its face, it will affect more than just me.'

If Schepisi, with his big budget and hype,

was the name of 1978, the great white hope for the future rests on a young director who has a hit with his first full-length feature. Phillip Noyce, with little pre-release publicity, captivated audiences with *Newsfront*, the story of two rival Australian newsreel companies in the days before television, which cleverly weaves actual newsreel footage into its fictional plot. It had audiences queuing for tickets when it opened in Sydney and Melbourne, and brought bursts of applause when the end credits rolled. Should it be thought that it only struck a parochial nerve, Noyce took the film to the New York and London festivals, where it received enthusiastic reviews.

'I have been wondering for several months why it had so much appeal,' Noyce says. 'I expect it has a lot to do with the fact that Britain and America have a comparable social and political history. People in those countries see in the events portrayed in the film a close parallel to their own lives and experiences. Twelve thousand miles away there was a country going through the same changes; there is a reaffirmation of both the British and U.S. cultural and political history in a country so distant.'

He sees *Newsfront* as a departure from other Australian productions. 'In some ways it is the first Australian film which has attempted to define the mores and sensibilities of an Australian generation, and I feel that critics have recognised it as a product of a truly national cinema. I've tried to achieve a new film reality, where obviously fictional characters have been placed on the same time plane as the original newsreel film. In the United States, the critics responded to the moral stance that the central characters adopt, particularly Len (the chief cameraman), who refuses to sell out. The Americans are searching for stability after the Nixon and Vietnam years, and this moral position was seen as being a reaffirmation of the mood of the audience there.'

Noyce did not make the film with the overseas market in mind; and the fact that he has succeeded where other film-makers, more self-consciously aiming at foreign sales, have failed may be a lesson to the industry. Noyce takes the view that carbon copies of American products will only come a cropper. The country's cinema can only succeed by telling Australian stories in a style that reflects the national character. 'Critics and audiences are jaded—there is a shortage of ideas world-wide and there is going to be a downturn in production as a result. *Newsfront* was unlike anything else they had seen. It just came along at the right moment. We have to be realistic and realise that the critics have to fill their pages with something. At Cannes, for example, there were very few films which seemed to be pointing in a new direction; *Newsfront* was one of them.'

Noyce differs strongly from Ginnane and others who feel that a tough financial attitude should be taken to all film projects. 'We have got to have subsidised films here. We have the opportunity to create a truly great cinema movement—we should throw caution to the wind. It should be possible to finance the renegade and encourage the outlandish. In the United States a film like *Newsfront* would never be made; we should have fewer films going for tried and true formulas. There is a vacuum in the world that Australia can fill; we have to extend the medium. Our films

are recognised as being technically efficient; what we need now is to get into the area of financial co-operation with overseas cinema interests, people like EMI and Fox.'

The nostalgia film, Noyce argues, owes its importance to the absence of a defined cultural heritage in Australia. These films are defining a nation's experience, largely for the first time. 'We haven't got a tradition of self-examination and only a small literary tradition. We'll make contemporary films as soon as we have sorted out the past.' His own next project is indeed contemporary. Provisionally titled *King Hit*, it will centre on the dismissal of the Whitlam Labour Government in 1975. The decision of the then Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, to sack Whitlam and his cabinet because supply was refused in the Senate (even though the Labour Government had a majority in the House of Representatives) brought about a constitutional crisis and a political bitterness that still bites deeply into Australians. Noyce will not talk about the project and the obvious difficulties of portraying men who are still alive and very familiar to the public. 'There will be no announcements until it is all over. I am determined that the film should not be pre-judged by the critics. The audiences will make up their own minds. The film will be so startling, so significant in style and innovation that it will speak for itself. There will be no sneak previews and it will be made on a closed set.'

But can a film industry blossom if it depends on Government finance? Tim Burstall, for one, does not believe so. What it does in fact, he suggests, is to make the industry one large state film unit. 'I can tell you for example that the Victorian Film Corporation has, since its inception, lost every penny that it has invested in films. The South Australian Film Corporation owes large sums of money even with great successes like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Sunday Too Far Away* and *Storm Boy*. The massive injection of government money after 1975 put too much pressure on the resources of the industry. At the same time colour television came in, the market for cinemas was reduced by forty per cent and this has never been recovered.'

'The number of successful pictures has not increased even though we are making more films,' says Burstall. 'In 1974 we made eight pictures in Australia and five broke even. The next year we made sixteen films and only four have not lost money. *Don's Party* only cost \$275,000 but the investors have never had a cent back. The Australian film industry looks like a marvellous set up but it is far from healthy.' He points to the heavy administrative costs now being imposed; the Australian Film Commission, for example, employs 55 people and a third of its budget goes in the cost of administration. 'The London Times may talk about an Australian film miracle, but apart from a few art house showings the British don't buy our pictures. There is a certain condescension about what they expect from us.'

Burstall also has harsh words for the 'nostalgia' film. He points to pictures like the recently released *The Irishman*, starring Michael Craig, which portrays a man who drives a horse team just as the motor lorry is being introduced into Australia. 'This film is just a blown-up public relations effort. Then there's *Newsfront*, which idealises ninth-rate



Australian alternatives: 'town councillor art' in 'The Irishman', or Hollywood action in 'The Money Movers'

news reporters. Those men never did interpretive reporting of the sort that is standard in television today. Things like *Caddie* and *The Irishman* are town councillor art.' He blames the failure of *Eliza Fraser* (which brought in Trevor Howard and Susannah York) on the reluctance of Australian audiences to accept a realistic view of the country's history. 'The public and press wanted to see it as an epic. They didn't want to see their history portrayed on the screen basically as bullshit, even though they know that is really the case.'

At the other end of the financial scale from *Eliza Fraser* is *Mouth to Mouth*, a \$129,000 movie about four young people in Melbourne who cannot get work. The film has been enthusiastically reviewed and has made its director, 29-year-old John Duigan, one of the better known film-makers in Australia. Before *Mouth to Mouth* he made another low budget film, *The Trespassers*, which was about the difference in people's personal and public politics. Duigan has recently finished shooting *Dimboola*, which is an Australian farce, but plans to return to 'art house' films. He is now scripting *Someone Left the Cake Out in the Rain*, which will deal with the controversial issue of uranium mining.

Duigan agrees with Phillip Noyce that the government should support the film industry.

Scandinavian and Eastern European filmmakers are subsidised and most of their products do not get many overseas sales, which he maintains is an analogous situation to that of Australia. 'There is too much preoccupation in Australia with overseas sales,' he says. 'People think they haven't quite made it if the film has not been sold overseas. The film industry here suffers from constant personal attacks. We are making judgments in the dark. But there are grounds for optimism. There has never been any question of withdrawing subsidies from theatre or opera, so why from film?'

There is no doubt that the Australian industry has reached a turning point. There is also little chance that the industry will find money to continue the high level of production attained in the last three years. The dark clouds are looming. Australian films increasingly have an important place in the cinema of the English speaking world and have, for one thing, started to repair the nation's image abroad as being a cultural desert. And this cinema is being taken seriously within Australia, a nation which has hitherto adopted an attitude of cultural cringe, or inferiority complex, towards its own artistic efforts. The fact that the Australian cinema has overcome that is alone sufficient reason why film-making here should mature and prosper.

Tom Milne

Goretta's 'ROADS OF EXILE'

Since their initial collaboration on the Free Cinema short *Nice Time* in 1956, Claude Goretta and Alain Tanner have been gradually parting company as film-makers, until it is now obvious that these two leading Swiss directors are travelling in different directions. The difference has been neatly defined by Goretta himself: 'Tanner's films always have a discourse; mine do everything they can to avoid one.' While Tanner, in other words, has evolved in a comparatively direct line from the dogmatic social concerns of Free Cinema, Goretta has turned aside by way of the more free-wheeling moral curiosity of Jean Renoir, who was an unmistakable influence on *L'Invitation* (1973), and to whom Goretta had paid tribute two years earlier with *Le Jour des Noces*, a very loose remake for television of *Une Partie de Campagne*.

Of his own heroes, characters like the enigmatically aloof barman played by François Simon in *L'Invitation*, or the equally enigmatic gentle creature played by Isabelle Huppert in *La Dentellière* (1977), Goretta notes that 'they have a richness inside that the other characters don't notice. And my problem as the director is to show the audience that these people are much more interesting than what they reveal to others.' One is irresistibly reminded of that quintessential Renoir statement 'Everyone has his reasons'; and of the way his adherence to it

continually revealed unexpected dimensions and unsuspected depths to his characters.

While critics were hard put to it to extract a meaning from the apparently lightweight *L'Invitation*, the problem with *La Dentellière* was, contrariwise, that while inviting as many interpretations as one cared to make, it quietly dissociated itself from any of them. In the broadest of feminist terms, covering sex, class, education and opportunity, brutality is obviously done to the film's heroine. Yet the paradox, the still centre of Goretta's film, is that Pomme (Isabelle Huppert), exquisitely

content just to be, has neither need nor desire for improvement. Without education, without ambition, without defence against the lover who eventually casts her aside, she nevertheless reveals a quality of inner strength, a mysterious perfection which ridicules any idea that she could be 'liberated' to improve herself and her lot. In a very real sense, what Goretta is doing in these films is dusting off and refurbishing Arthur Miller's famous plea on behalf of his salesman, Willy Loman: 'Attention must be paid to this man'.

So, and paying due attention, one finds the nascent discourses in the films—on social conventions and hypocrisies in *L'Invitation*, on various kinds of chauvinism in *La Dentellière*—retreating in confusion before characters who persistently deny their relevance. And it is here that the teasing ambiguities begin. Just as one can never quite pin down the alternative vision to what he witnesses that one senses in the barman of *L'Invitation*, so one can never be entirely sure of Pomme in *La Dentellière*. Is she really a creature of infinite variety, harbouring magical inner delights only awaiting a sign of

François Simon as Jean-Jacques Rousseau



encouragement to blossom forth, or is she perhaps no more than the sum of what one sees on the surface?

It is of course always more pleasant to be allowed freedom of choice instead of being directed what to think about inescapable conclusions; and it may well be that this indirection accounts, at least in part, for the startling international success of *La Dentelliére*, a quiet film received with the sort of quiet critical enthusiasm that all too rarely results in queues at the box-office. Or does the attraction perhaps lie equally in the way that current ideological questions are transformed, unrecognisably, by a certain elegance revived from bygone days?

Goretta freely admits to being influenced by Robert Altman's work, in particular by 'his way of showing people through small things'. But where Altman's perceptions are seized on the wing out of a characteristically twentieth century bustle, Goretta's are frozen in the forgotten amber he evokes by referring to genre painting in the closing title of *La Dentelliére*: 'He passed her by, very close, without seeing her. Because she was one of those souls who make no sign, but who must be patiently sought, whom one must know how to see. In bygone days an artist would have seen her as the subject of a genre painting. She would have been a seamstress, a water-carrier, or a lace-maker.'

'The Lace-maker,' Goretta further explains, 'is the title of a painting by Vermeer. What is Vermeer's world? It's a world of silence and slow-motion life, very slow.' A world, in other words, of studied familiarity in which, just as people have teased for centuries over the enigma of the Mona Lisa's smile, one is at leisure to speculate on the mystery revealed in everyday scenes by qualities of light, shadow, expression and suspended movement.

Where Tanner has followed Godard's path, Goretta has in fact taken rather the same byway as Eric Rohmer, whose *Ma Nuit chez Maud* met with another equally unexpected success. Given the fact that Rohmer's characters rarely stop talking while Goretta's are usually reluctant to open their mouths, this comparison may seem paradoxical, if not indeed perverse. Yet what interests Goretta about this silence, seen at its most extreme in the heroine of *La Dentelliére* and never for a moment suggesting Pinterish problems of incommunicability, is that conversation is not felt to be necessary because communication seems to be self-evident. Reversing this proposition, as it were, Rohmer's characters talk endlessly to each other, meanwhile discovering that something else again, something unspoken alongside their chatter, has made nonsense of their attempts to explain.

All Rohmer's characters talk one way, but have to live by another. In *Ma Nuit chez Maud*, for instance, the pressing Catholic debate on choice and the possibility of purity in chance sexual encounters is undercut by the bleak commentary offered by the snowy landscapes of Clermont-Ferrand. During the projected marital seven year itch of *L'Amour, l'après-midi*, domestic interiors tranquil with familiar happiness give the lie to the illusion of adventure offered by bustling Paris streets alive with fantasy. In *Le Genou de Claire*, that rosy celebration of the middle-aged mind's capacity to dwell not only on what might have been but on what might yet be, the

setting—the lush green lakeside drenched by summer sun but ringed by snowcapped mountains—is a frosty reminder that nostalgia for youth means that old age is not too far away.

So too with Goretta, except that his characters live one way, pressured by talk to speculate on another. Here the settings are equally important in providing not only a sensual gratification for the spectator (the picnic on the grass in *L'Invitation*, Proust's Cabourg in *La Dentelliére*), but an objective correlative (or corrective) to what the characters say (or don't say). Trapped in off-season Cabourg and meeting a romantic stranger amid the abandoned tennis courts and rapidly emptying cafés, one of Rohmer's characters would doubtless have soared into a complex verbal fantasy of entrancing possibilities whose fruition would be denied in advance by the atmosphere of mournful desolation in which they arose. And although Goretta's Pomme never articulates such dreams, they are nevertheless unmistakably there in her mind.



Conceived as a four-part series for television, and backed by a consortium of European TV networks including the BBC, *Les Chemins de l'Exil, ou les Dernières Années de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* was recast in two parts following the death of Rossellini, who had been interested in the project and which subsequently proved more difficult to finance. Among the losses was a broader scope which could take in, for instance, Rousseau's crucial experience of governmental politics and chicanery during his period as an ambassadorial secretary in Venice. Among the gains, despite the fact that one now has to take most of Rousseau's political and sociological convictions on trust, is a greater concentration on his private persona, which means that Goretta's film emerges as a sort of codicil to *The Confessions*, exploring and elucidating aspects of himself that Rousseau never fully confessed.

Here again the settings are absolutely central. On the one hand, the succession of cold, cramped interiors in which Rousseau moves from exile to exile in a bleak dependence on his lifelong companion Thérèse Le Vasseur, echoed by the equally cold but expansive elegance of the society salons in which he is forever hovering without ever managing to seem at home. On the other, the green fields, the tranquil valleys and the untamed mountains of Switzerland (unspoiled locations for which Goretta found mostly in France) among which, like one of his own noble savages, Rousseau finds himself in romantic communion with the harmony of the spheres: an intimation of pure innocence which in fact cradles his steadily mounting apprehension of guilt.

Contrary to his own predilection for characters who prefer to maintain silence, Goretta has chosen in Rousseau one who never stops talking. Yet the contradiction is only apparent. From Rousseau's pen, mostly spoken on the screen, pours a compulsive stream of social, political, economic, religious and emotional controversy, backed by an equally compulsive stream of self-explanation, self-justification and self-mortification. Like the Rousseau of *The Confessions*, who promised a self-portrait

absolutely true to nature, and 'as vile and despicable when my behaviour was such, as good, generous and noble when I was so,' the Rousseau of the film (a quite astonishing performance by François Simon) sets out to be totally honest, with confessions sometimes volunteered, sometimes wrung from him. Nevertheless, the key moments of revelation in the film are precisely those in which he remains silent.

There is a superb scene, for instance, in which Rousseau is talking to the publisher, Rey, who is to bring out his forthcoming *Social Contract*. A few lines of dialogue (the script by Georges Haldas and Goretta is a model of economy and intelligence throughout) perfectly establish not only the naive logic of Rousseau's thinking, but the seductive power which made him a more pressing target for official suppression than Voltaire, Diderot and D'Alembert put together:

ROUSSEAU: Yes, my dear Rey, man is born free, and is everywhere in chains. Once, in his natural state, he was innocent, free and happy. But Society has corrupted him and made him a slave. It is Society that has made him unhappy.

REY: But will your new society make him any happier?

ROUSSEAU: Yes, because in the society I dream of, where the people will reign, a privileged handful will no longer be able to reduce men to poverty and servitude.

REY: A devilishly dangerous idea, Monsieur Rousseau. You are attacking the divine right of kings...

At which point, Rey seeks clarification on the puzzling point as to why Rousseau, the champion of liberty, nevertheless advocates retention of the death penalty in his ideal society. Rousseau responds with unhesitating confidence—'Those who threaten liberty are criminals who deserve exemplary punishment—but at the same time abruptly raises his hand to his head as though assailed by a sudden, inexplicable pain. Over the reiteration of his words, 'Man is born free', we then cut to Thérèse, in illiterate French, painfully writing a letter to him in exile. His gesture is the one and only acknowledgment (*The Confessions* remain silent on the subject) that he himself may have made Thérèse unhappy and a slave.

Covering the years from Rousseau's exile after the burning of *Emile* in 1762 to his death in 1778, but ranging back to privileged moments in his past by way of flashback, *Les Chemins de l'Exil* essentially comprises three movements. (1) Rousseau's exiled wanderings in Switzerland and England, marked by a progressive persecution mania which finally drove him back to France to restore his name and honour by confronting those enemies whose aim he now believed was literally to assassinate him. (2) His attempts to alleviate his present misery by recapturing and/or exorcising the past. (3) His curiously shadowy relationship with Thérèse.

The first movement, carrying the whole narrative weight of the film, is strung out on a series of bad news missives bringing reports of new book-burnings or attacks by Church, State or literary establishment which necessitate feverishly penned replies and equally feverish removals to safer ground. Almost without realising it, so cunningly is the pill disguised, one swallows Rousseau's ideas

in predigested toto, while at the same time receiving an object lesson in what Lord Keith (William Fox), the exiled Scot who befriends his fellow exile as Governor of Neuchâtel under Frederick II of Prussia, describes as the bugbear of government: the way that 'small problems turn into large tragedies'.

With inexorable logic, the film proceeds to demonstrate how the small problem of Rousseau's naive but unassailible logic (aggravated by the fact that he was no atheist, like the Encyclopaedists, but a sincere believer) becomes a large tragedy for reasons having less to do with what he is saying than with the martyrdom provoked by blind, bulldozing officialdom. Meanwhile, Rousseau suffers his own apotheosis, first stoned and cast out from his refuge at Môtiers; then transforming an avuncularly jolly David Hume (John Sharp), face heavily underlit by sinister shadows but redolent of post-prandial good cheer as he dozes by the firelight in an armchair, into a Scottish Judas; and finally achieving a sort of crucifixion in an extraordinary scene where, forbidden to publish and meeting with indifference in his attempts to read *The Confessions* to salon gatherings, he hurries off to Notre Dame to entrust the manuscript of his *Dialogues* to the mercies of the God of justice and truth, only to find that the gates of the altar are locked and that even He has apparently abandoned him.

The irony here (an irony which does not preclude sympathy and even admiration for Rousseau) is compounded by the irretrievably false logic which drives Rousseau to seek approbation for his philosophies from the salons which are the very home of his 'privileged handful'. Understandable in an underprivileged boy who fled from hunger and brutal beatings to be vouchsafed a tantalising glimpse of sensual and sensuous paradise by his beloved Maman (Madame de Warens, who became his adopted mother and mistress combined), his pride and vanity and social aspirations are indefensible in the advocate of the noble savage. Yet where else but the salons, in those days of restricted

communications and even more restricted education, could one best hope to start a new revolution?

The second movement is in fact a stasis, predicated upon Rousseau's own invocation to the past: 'Precious moment, so much mourned, begin again your pleasant journey within me. Flow more slowly through my memory, if you can . . .' Here, usually for moments of pain that require exorcism, Goretta sometimes uses the *Mademoiselle Julie* (or *Wild Strawberries*) trick of having past and present inhabit the same frame. Watching his childhood self protesting his innocence while being brutally beaten for stealing a comb, Rousseau boldly faces the camera to attribute his lifelong hatred of injustice to the fact that he was innocent. Watching his adolescent self sobbing uncontrollably after his initiation into sex by Madame de Warens, he turns more hesitantly to confide the doubt that has perhaps only just entered his mind: 'For the first time I found myself in a woman's arms. Was I happy? No, I savoured the pleasure, but the charm was spoiled by an invincible sadness. It was as though I had committed incest . . .'

Shortly after this, in exile at Môtiers, Rousseau is visited by a neighbour, the deliciously adolescent Isabelle d'Ivernois. Visibly moved by her freshness and youth, he invites her to take a glass of milk with him in the summery orchard, and her unconscious gesture of wiping traces of milk from her lip (but we see the gesture *after* the association it evokes) conjures the equally entrancing memory of Madame d'Houdetot (played by Martine Chevallier, and looking uncannily like the teasingly provocative Arletty of *Les Enfants du Paradis*), for whom Rousseau had conceived the unrequited passion that inspired the heady romantic flights of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. But the image is fleeting; what Rousseau is seeking to dredge out of his memories is not romantic recollection but the reassurance of some permanence in happiness. A sense of loss informs the entire film, and it is to the exquisite, tranquil images of Madame de Warens, made to flow more slowly through his memory as she strolls in

the sunlight, pauses to look back over her shoulder, smiles directly to camera, that he turns for an illusion of fulfilment in the comfort and safety of a mistress/mother's love. Only then does he think of Thérèse, whom he belatedly married in 1768.

The third movement is mainly silence, dominated by the presence of Thérèse, admirably played by Dominique Labourier as another Vermeer lace-maker, eternally in the background sewing or cooking, and casting a brooding mantle of love and hatred over Rousseau's fevered flights from plot, real or imagined, into counterplot. In researching the film, Haldas and Goretta were struck by the fact that, although she was omnipresent in Rousseau's life for thirty-five years, only a very shadowy portrait of Thérèse emerged. Contemporary memoirs, one describing a dinner at which 'Mademoiselle Thérèse' was an inexplicable presence maintaining a glum silence, another an occasion at which she was the life and soul of the party, even suggested two contradictory figures.

Thérèse is therefore presented almost literally as two distinct halves, one mutely accusing, one patiently loving, reconciled only when Rousseau finally comes to acknowledge his own contradictions: 'Eternal Being, gather about me the host of my fellowmen. Let them hear my confessions, bewail my indignities, blush for my misdeeds. Let each one bare his heart to Your Throne as sincerely. Then let any man who dare, say: I was better than this man.'

Ending with a summary quotation from Goethe—'With Voltaire, an old world ended; with Rousseau, a new world began'—the film in fact shows Rousseau struggling to reconcile that opinion to his private as well as his public self. Prophetically defined at their first meeting, when he assures her that although he will never leave her he will also never marry her (because, as he disarmingly confides to the audience, he thought he could love only the graces and laces of society ladies), his relationship to Thérèse seems to be resolutely of the old world. Certainly she plays devoted slave to his kind master; certainly (echoes here of François and Pomme from *La Dentellière*) she remains illiterate and ignorant; and equally certainly, alleging a wish to avoid jeopardising his liberty as a writer, he forces her to give up her five children by him to the poor house rather than accept the King's pension that would have enabled him to support them.

Yet even here there are contradictions, like the scene in the Marechal de Luxembourg's salon where the embarrassed aristocrats turn aside as Rousseau unashamedly acknowledges Thérèse's love in her distress at his impending exile. Or the openness with which Rousseau reveals his dependence upon her, even while introducing her as 'my housekeeper'. Or the crucial scene in which, with Rousseau backed into a corner to face his guilt about their children, Thérèse suddenly clasps him like a child, realising that his overriding terror is of execution or assassination. It is, finally, Thérèse's selfless devotion that leads him to discover the secret he has been seeking, and which surfaces in an absolute tranquillity at the end of his life as he sits under a shady tree, enjoying the blessings of nature as he opens a small boy's eyes to the mysteries of creation: 'I know that within me there is innocence . . .'

'Les Chemins de l'Exil': François Simon, Martine Chevallier



In The Picture

End of the Road for Quota?

In 1977, some 181 cinemas or approximately 12 per cent of British screens failed to achieve the prescribed 30 per cent quota of British or Community films, according to a recent parliamentary answer given by the Films Minister, Michael Meacher. It is extremely unlikely, however, that any further action will be taken by the Department of Trade, since any exhibitor may offer as a defence that it was not commercially practicable to meet the quota requirement owing to the character of the films available or their excessive cost.

Quota was introduced in 1927. It has been seen as one of the three key protective devices of British film legislation, the other two being the Eady Levy and the National Film Finance Corporation. In theory it is quota which helps to ensure that British films are screened in British cinemas, but over the years the crude nationalist assumptions on which films legislation is based have become increasingly irrelevant to the problems of British film producers. After the war, as the PEP Report clearly showed, the control of the industry lay with the distributor. During the GATT negotiations, however, distributors' quotas were declared illegal, although screen quotas were permissible. Sir Harold Wilson, however, continued to doubt the wisdom of the U.K. agreeing to such a move. Writing in *SIGHT AND SOUND* in 1952, after he had left the Board of Trade, he noted: 'I have my doubts now about our wisdom in entering into international agreements to bar renters' quota and to substitute a system of screen quotas.' He went on to suggest the re-introduction of a renters' quota.

The simple nationalist concept of quota took a further knock when Britain joined the Common Market in 1973 and British quota was replaced by a 'British or Community' quota to bring the U.K. into line with EEC competition policy. Since that time, the number of British long films registered has halved (from 80 in 1973 to 42 in 1977), while the number of Community long films registered has remained approximately the same, at about 85 films per year. Many of these Community films are of the 'soft porn' type. According to the latest annual report of the

Cinematograph Films Council, there is some evidence that cinemas show these films in order to achieve quota even though they regard them as unsuitable, largely as a result of the decline in the number of British films available.

Apart from Italy, Britain is the only country in the EEC which deploys quota regulations as part of its armoury of protective legislation, and the whole future of quota legislation is now under review. The Cinematograph Films Council has recommended that legislation should be introduced to suspend quota, but the Minister has not yet taken a final decision. Politicians will need to do some fundamental rethinking about films policy, for quota is the legislative linchpin on which other film legislation is hinged.

If (Community) quota is to continue, it will only be acceptable to the exhibitor if there are enough (British) films available for him to meet his quota requirement without undue loss of business. So long as there is an adequate supply of films, few problems remain, as past experience has shown; but when, as now, there is a shortage of suitable films, a fundamental choice has to be faced. Should the legislation be waived to enable cinemas to stay open, or should it be vigorously enforced against the commercial interests of film exhibitors, bearing in mind the general downward trend of cinema exhibition and the fact that it is American films which have been responsible for the box-office upturn during 1978?

If, on the other hand, quota is not to continue, any public policy which protects or subsidises film production in Britain will have to be accompanied by a policy which ensures that the films are screened for the British public. Should any films so produced be able to compete with those coming from Hollywood, as the British Film Producers Association would advocate? Or should exhibition also be subsidised, by building up a small national circuit of independent productions in areas of high population density, as the Independent Filmmakers Association advocates? Would either of these solutions command the support of that majority of the House of Commons which sees itself as moderate and reformist? Indeed, is a 'moderate' solution possible once quota is abolished?

The proposals advanced by the Association of Independent Producers depend on increasing the quota now that Britain is a member of the European Community and on breaking up the main exhibition circuits so that independent British producers could compete with other EEC producers however their films are financed. If quota goes, these proposals become untenable, and if Parliament is asked to support the production of British films with public money it will have to choose either to compete with Hollywood on its own terms or to make available further money to subsidise their exhibition. If not, it will have to hope that the films are shown on TV.

VINCENT PORTER

Indian Panorama

The excitement of Indian cinema, for Western visitors, is that it is still like rediscovering Hollywood of the great days. There is a vast, untiring, ever-growing audience. The boom goes on. In 1978 production rose to 619 feature films, from 557 in 1977 and 507 in 1976. Stars are still stars and a première is still a première. Shyam Benegal's *Junoon* had its opening during the time of the Delhi Film Festival, with torch-bearers and lines of horsemen outside the cinema, along with a riot of fans hysterical for a glimpse of the star, Shashi Kapoor, or anyone else who obliged by arriving in a limousine.

The present boom is not just economic. At the start of the 70s the 'art cinema' by and large meant Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Ritwik Ghatak, working in isolation in Bengal, unwanted and unloved by the commercial cinema. At the 1975 Delhi festival, there were enough new films and progressive film-makers—Benegal (*Ankur*), Girish Karnad (*Kaadu*), Mani Kaul (*Uski Roti*), M. S. Sathyu (*Garm Hava*), Reddy (*Samskara*)—to declare the existence of a 'Parallel Cinema' and to force a confrontation with the commercial

establishment. In four years the new cinema has grown progressively. The 'Indian Panorama' at last year's festival in Madras revealed the energetic activity of the Southern cinemas and the results of miscellaneous schemes of subsidies and premiums launched by the various state governments and the National Film Finance Corporation. This year Delhi confirmed the 'Indian Panorama' as an annual event, and the major attraction for European visitors to the festival.

The strength of the new directors is their realistic awareness that they can only demand distribution for films that are accessible to popular audiences. Some of his critics feel that Shyam Benegal's embrace of commercial tradition has been too warm in *Junoon*, a historical spectacular set in the period of the Sepoy rebellion. It was impossible to judge this elaborately plotted film fairly, however, as the promised subtitled print had been mislaid somewhere on the way from Europe.

Bombay, traditionally India's film capital, has for the first time lost its statistical lead: in 1978 more films were made in Kerala than in the Hindi language. 'Money making remains the primary concern of Hindi films,' writes a contributor to the booklet which accompanied the Indian panorama. 'They have very little to do with understanding our lives.' The new film-makers have a very conscious social and personal awareness. They have now, they say, passed through their 'village period'; urban cultural breakdown is now a dominant theme. Mrinal Sen's *Pashuram* is the story of a peasant who arrives to join the society of Calcutta pavement dwellers. It is full of Sen's beautiful irony, but fails either to define its hero or successfully to realise the style of 'realist fantasy' which succeeded so well in Sen's *A Village Story*.

Muzaffar Ali's *Gaman* (*Going*) is also about a dispossessed peasant: his hero leaves his village to become a taxi driver in Bombay. A

Robert Altman directs Paul Newman in 'Quintet'



remarkably confident first film, with acute perceptions of both peasant culture and urban social chaos, it belies its modest budget. Ali is a particularly appealing figure, combining the instincts of an artist (his training as a painter shows in the images) with a practical business sense. He is an executive in Air India and has 'invented' the Marketing Union of Cinematograph Technicians, a group of film-makers aiming to market and distribute films which are 'non-compromising without being non-commercial'.

The Strange Fate of Arvind Desai is another first film and another critical portrait of Bombay—this time through the eyes of the 'alienated' son of a prosperous middle-class family. Directed by Saeed Mirza, it is the second production of the Yukt Film Co-operative, a group of graduates of the Poona Film Institute whose first work was *Ghashiram Kotwal*. The hero's business is a shop which sells peasant crafts to tourists. He is a living symptom of social decay; his tragedy is self-awareness. The film's formal ambitions are not all realised, but it is an impressively bitter portrayal of a society united only by mutual hatred and cheating.

Once Upon a Time and Once Again is the fourth film of Girish Karnad (Rhodes Scholar, PPE at Oxford, and the director of *Kaadu*). At once a frank tribute to Kurosawa and to the *kung fu* tradition, this is the first Indian martial arts picture. It is set in the fourteenth century (India claims to be the birthplace of martial arts, created by the Buddhist priests who were not allowed to carry arms but had to protect themselves against marauding bandits on the roads). In a supremely enjoyable film, Karnad brings to the genre historical authenticity, human characters, a strong narrative sense and some brilliantly choreographed fights.

The most mysterious and magical film of the Indian panorama, however, turned out to be *Thampu* (*The Tent*), directed by G. Aravindan—a

rotund and patriarchally bearded young man who looks like a sage but is in fact Regional Officer of the Kerala Rubber Board. Knowing Aravindan's previous film, the very taut and formal *Kanchana Sita* (*Golden Sita*), you understand how conscious is the apparent defiance of form in this new film, which contemplates, with endless patience, the comingings and the goings of a circus in a little Kerala village. The circus people—an elderly lady acrobat, the dwarf, the manager, the sorrowful old clown, a couple of fat girls who do tricks on bicycles—carry on with their job; sometimes they speak their minds; the village people come to gaze and laugh; life is lived. The black and white images are breathtaking; and the particular quality of Aravindan's observation is to watch and wait for the last moment and the last gesture which gives a shot its full significance. The film haunts the memory. Aravindan and his fellow Keralan John Abraham—the ironic, romantically self-destructive director of *Donkey in a Brahmin Village*, which first appeared at Madras last year—are perhaps the Indian cinema's true avant-garde.

DAVID ROBINSON

French-Canadian

Last year, when the Toronto Film Festival wanted to screen Ettore Scola's *Una Giornata Particolare*, the organisers called producer Carlo Ponti in Rome to arrange it. The response was: 'For a Canadian festival? But surely it would be easier to arrange it all there; after all, it's a Canadian film.' Given the director, cast, and language of the film, that co-production fact had embarrassingly slipped everyone's mind. This is exactly the sort of thing which upsets a good many Canadians who are sensitive to 'national identity'. Although he had their more powerful neighbour to the south in mind, the remarks of Progressive Conservative Party spokesman David MacDonald

to the Canadian House of Commons might apply just as well to Italy, France, Israel, West Germany and the U.K., all of which are currently involved in Canadian co-productions: 'We are unique in the industrialised world in the extent to which our mass media—which are the lifeblood of a nation's identity—are controlled from outside our borders. There exists a serious danger that this infant industry will become a ward of the Hollywood majors, thus defeating the purpose of creating a genuine Canadian industry.'

Up to now, the legislation providing for 100 per cent tax write-offs for film investment has proved attractive to foreign investors as well, particularly since the current requirement for 30 per cent 'Canadian content' has thus far been vaguely defined in terms of the passporting of people working on a film. This has often meant merely the casting of official Canadians in minor roles (John Vernon in the Scola film), the use of established Hollywood stars who have retained their Canadian citizenship (Donald Sutherland in Chabrol's *Blood Relatives*), or the hiring of enough Canadian technicians to fill out the required percentage. There is a good deal of sympathy for a movement—led by the Progressive Conservatives—to redefine the requirements to make the 'creative core' of a film Canadian by forcing those interested in the tax write-offs to hire a Canadian director or writer, and to have a fully Canadian production and distribution company. The latter is especially problematical if the ever-increasing co-production system is to continue.

Until the general elections later this year, when a PCP majority might take control, or until the Liberal Party itself decides to alter the current legislation, it appears that it will be business as usual, particularly as the Canadian Film Development Corporation (a federal government investment bank) seems more and

more attracted to co-productions.

Perhaps because of the 'special relationship' France has always maintained with Canada (extending even to lower postage rates between the countries), and because of the commercial and critical success in France of a number of recent co-productions—including Chabrol's *Blood Relatives* and *Violette Nozière*—there is a good deal of excitement in Paris and Montreal over the possibilities of an even stronger 'special relationship'. Three such co-productions are currently shooting or are already in post-production, Nicolas Gessner's *It Rained All Night the Day I Left*, Maurice Dugowson's *Au Revoir, A Lundi*, and Mary Stephen's *Night Fires*, with at least half a dozen more in the script or pre-planning stages, including a new, as yet untitled, Chabrol.

Of these only Dugowson's film has received CFDC funding. Written by Dugowson and his brother Jacques from Roger Fournier's novel, *Moi, mon corps, mon âme, Montréal, etc.*, *Au Revoir* is about two women, one French, the other Canadian, who share a Montreal apartment and the effect their love affairs have on their relationship, with Denise Filiatrault and Carole Laure providing the 'required' Canadian balance in the cast against the French Claude Brasseur and Miou-Miou. The CFDC is evidently hoping that Dugowson, whose previous *Lily aime-moi* and *F comme Fairbanks* met with critical approval but public indifference, will break through commercially this time. CFDC executive director Michael McCabe has, after all, explained: 'It is no longer feasible to make films that will be seen only by a handful of people. If it takes stories with wide appeal and international stars to reach screens around the world then that's what we'll invest in.'

Even with the 100 per cent tax write-off and a French producer willing to venture into 'uncommercial' territory, however, potential private investors in Canada seem to be following McCabe's lead even in considering the most seriously conceived *film d'auteur*. Producer-cinematographer John Cressey's search for the Canadian portion of the 'nearly one million dollar' budget for *Night Fires*, with Alain Dehan as French co-producer, was a two-year nightmare. Even those who admired writer-director Mary Stephen's previous *Ombres de Soie* and her new script, set in the hermetic world of an upper bourgeois Paris family early in the century, only began to reach for their cheque-books when they were assured that the cast would include international stars like Jeanne Moreau and Ingrid Caven.

Nor are the Canadians willing to allow the Canadian-French relationship to remain on the level of co-production alone. While Parisian cinéphiles admire a number of the more important film-makers of Quebec, English-Canadian cinema remains unknown in France. To remedy that situation, and to illustrate the reality of a national identity outside Quebec Province, Jean Lefebvre of the Secretary of

'Thampu': '... the comingings and goings of a circus in a little Kerala village'



State's Festival Bureau has begun planning a Fortnight of English-Canadian Cinema in conjunction with Frederick Mitterrand's Olympic cinema complex in Paris for September. Although the titles have yet to be chosen, the programme will be partly a retrospective and partly a showcase for new films by new directors, like Harry Sutherland, whose *Truxx* was a highlight of last year's Toronto Festival, and who is now himself in Paris and working on a series of films about the cinema.

DAVID L. OVERBY

Radio On

Chris Petit, former film editor of *Time Out*, has been luckier than most new British film-makers in securing backing from three sources for *Radio On*, his modestly budgeted début a writer and director now in its final stages. The funding comes from the British Film Institute Production Board, the National Film Finance Corporation and West Germany's WDR Television. Somewhat surprised at his good fortune, Petit says he owes it more to a series of coincidences than to any coherent planning on his part.

The process is worth tracing, if only because it shows how things do sometimes come together for this country's less commercially oriented directors, and how this kind of pattern has some valuable lessons for the future. Petit started writing *Radio On* in January 1977 and shortly afterwards interviewed Wim Wenders, shooting *The American Friend* at the time. Wenders, hearing of the project, told him to keep in touch. Petit then sent Wenders a copy of the completed script and made one or two futile attempts to interest independent producers in Britain. He also approached the NFFC, who turned the project down as too avant-garde. Finally he submitted the script to the Production Board at the end of the year, and then saw Wenders again.

Wenders said he would try to raise money in Germany if a matching sum could be found in England. His interest encouraged the Production Board, then mulling over the possibilities of co-production. Meanwhile the NFFC grew keener when Petit went back to them with a name actor (who later had to drop out). While that happened, the Production Board made its decision to back the production in 16mm itself or, if other finance was available, on 35mm. The Board then liaised with the NFFC, and finally Road Movies, Wenders' production company, raised 30 per cent of the funding by pre-selling *Radio On* to WDR. The Production Board's share is £38,000.

This rather convoluted process, finally successful on three fronts, is for a black and white 35mm film for which the first idea was disarmingly simple—an ending which had a man dead, of vague causes, in the bath and Jim Morrison of The Doors over the soundtrack. Actually, the film now begins with a similar scene, which presages a journey from London to Bristol by the dead man's brother. *Radio On* thus has a narrative basis, but is by no means a



'Radio On'. Photograph by Mike Tomlinson

conventional narrative film. And if that sounds lacking in commercial appeal, the film is cheap enough to get its money back from the 'art-house' circuit and television sales.

'I saw *North by Northwest* again as I started writing the script,' says Petit, 'and that's really about someone totally unqualified to deal with the events he faces, who still manages to triumph over them. It would be more interesting, I thought, to have someone faced with something untoward and then actually not dealing with it. To make a non-thriller, in fact. What happens is that both the film and the main character get preoccupied by other things, deflected by them. So all I can say is that the film is about a journey, about two cities and about the everyday landscape between them. It is also about the feeling of dislocation—like Godard's *Paris in Alphaville*. As for the words, Chandler once said about writing: Don't take the slang of the period you are writing about. Make it up for yourself. This gives a sense of both the general and the particular. We hope to do something with language too.'

The central character is now David Beames, who has worked both in the theatre and on television. And in the film he meets, for instance, an Army deserter from Northern Ireland ('I wanted to get that in because it just hasn't been discussed before on film'). There are also three women in the story—one at the beginning of the film who decides to leave the man, another a German whom he meets in Bristol (Lisa Kreuzer), and the third who was the friend of his dead brother (Sandy Ratcliffe). Music will be very important, since this is after all a kind of road movie. But there will be no music track as such, just direct natural sound with the radio on. Hence the title. Stiff Records, David Bowie and the German group Craftwork provide the songs.

Economics means no Jim Morrison and no American music.

When plans to use Robby Mueller, Wenders' cameraman, fell through, Petit secured the services of Martin Schafer, his assistant, whom he found was 'the obvious choice all along'. So the Wenders connection, with Kreuzer in the cast, is strong. But not too strong, Petit hopes. 'He has been a very influential figure for me. His films have always examined the small moments one doesn't generally see in movies at all. And it works like magic. I remember him talking about when he shot *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty*. He said there was almost always a convenient and good American way of shooting. But he wanted to avoid it as far as possible. In the last resort, the Germans and French have been ready, like Wenders, to invent their own cinematic language. I don't see why the British shouldn't do that too. After all, there's no Golden Treasury to rifle. At least nothing I'm interested in.'

'Of course, it could all turn out to be a huge cul-de-sac. But I'm quite deliberately trying for something different, something that is perhaps English but owes no debt to conventional or even "unconventional" English films. And I honestly don't think that it's just Wenders pastiche, though at one time I was depressed and frightened about that. Until, that is, Wenders gave me some comfort. He told me that my preoccupations weren't the same, which I possibly knew instinctively all along. It's not at all like a Wenders film in tone. It's much blacker in terms of black and white, and less interested in the whole area of male relationships Wenders has taken from the American cinema. Incidentally, the black and white was a choice I made from the start. I went out in a car and took pictures of Westway in both colour and black and white. Then I showed them to friends. Everybody guessed where it

was with colour. But nobody knew with the black and white. I think there's something useful in that. Anyway, for what it's worth, Wenders told me that it's the most black and white script he'd ever seen!'

DEREK MALCOLM

Manchester Broadcasting Symposium

What do Michael Grade, Director of Programmes at London Weekend Television, and Jerome Singer, Professor of Psychology at Yale University, have in common? No, it's not a question from one of the quiz shows which were, among other kinds of television entertainment, the subject of the Tenth Broadcasting Symposium held in February at the University of Manchester. The answer, as it turned out, was very little except that they were appearing on the same bill. In part, it has to be admitted, this is the point of these events: that people with very different interests in broadcasting can get together and exchange views.

The problem was that few of the people addressing the symposium were talking about the same things. Michael Grade's opening talk was entitled 'Trends in Light Entertainment'; much of it was devoted to scoring easy points off the popular press for its trivialising coverage of television (the cynical might be forgiven for thinking this had something to do with the hostile reception given recently by several papers to LWT's *Bruce Forsyth's Big Night*). The remainder of the talk picked up where Grade left off last year at the Edinburgh Television Festival, where he generally blamed writers for the low quality of present sitcoms. A questioner in the audience attempted to be philosophical about this, suggesting that these things ran in cycles and that we'd just have to await the arrival of a fresh wave of

creativity like that of the late 60s. The subsequent discussion questioned neither the dubious historical perspective of this (were the 60s such a golden age?) nor the mystique of creativity involved in the argument.

Professor Singer spoke of his research into the effects on children of violence on television. It soon became clear that 'entertainment' was being interpreted in two ways. To the media professional it meant 'light entertainment', a category which has meaning only within the strangely organised world of television production, in which crime series are produced by drama departments, children's drama produced by children's departments and sitcoms, which are also drama, originate in departments of light entertainment—which also produce variety shows. To the academics (a term used by the media professionals to mean everyone else) entertainment, light or not, included all these things. There were also some awkward people who tended to think that all television, whether news, sport, science or whatever, aspires to the condition of entertainment.

No doubt much of what Professor Singer had to say was relevant to entertainment in the wider sense. Unfortunately violence on television is a subject which engenders so much heat and so little light that things were pulled off course. This was perhaps inevitable, given the presence of Mary Whitehouse. She was observed during the talk making copious notes, presumably on the assumption that the professor's work was all grist to her mill, as indeed at first sight it seemed to be.

Children with a high exposure to television, he had found, were even more likely to knock other children about. (It wasn't revealed whether their victims were those unfortunates whose aggressiveness hadn't been beefed up by watching equally large doses of television. But if they were, then all kids should be advised to watch television in huge quantities, otherwise they could be in trouble.) Too bad that Mrs. Whitehouse wasn't present at a later discussion when the professor stated that violence was not a major cause of aggression in children; the major causes being, in his view (and who could doubt it?), parental behaviour when the parents were violent towards the child, each other or the world in general.

The next session was also on research. Since virtually no one has done any recent research on light entertainment (professional definition) we had something completely different. Tony Flower of the Centre for Mass Communication Research, Leicester University, reported on his study of a drama-documentary and the differences between the producers' intentions and the audience readings of the programme. Fouli Papageorgiou of the Centre for Television Research, University of Leeds, produced some further work along the lines of the uses and gratifications approach first developed at Leeds.

Troy Kennedy Martin, writer on many series such as *Z Cars* and *The Sweeney*, was billed to give a talk entitled 'Is there a theory?' He

decided instead to make a protest against the anticipated refusal of the BBC to repeat *Law and Order*. This was a pity because the censorship issue led nowhere in the context in which he chose to raise it; whereas I for one would have gone further than Manchester to hear an established television writer talk about theory. My sense of an opportunity missed was sharpened by his passing reference to the *Screen Education* issue on *The Sweeney*; that at least would have been something to get our teeth into.

Finally, we had a talk which got down to some of the real issues, Richard Dyer on 'Entertainment and Stereotypes'. This was a subtle attempt to combine an attack on the stereotypes currently peddled by television with an argument that to reject stereotypes altogether would lead only to a representation of character devoid of any social referent. If every character is totally individual, what can you say about what people have in common? But by this time the damage had been done. The lack of a rigorous definition of the field of enquiry had left most people with a confused idea of what they were meant to be discussing. And Richard Dyer's talk could have been meaningfully responded to only in the context of a general recognition that television isn't simply about the freedom of the creative to create.

What gets on television is dependent not just on individuals but on what groups hold the reins of power. Troy Kennedy Martin had said that the creators must have total freedom to follow where their creativity led them; but this is a view that the non-creators can scarcely be expected to agree with. The logic of his argument, that there should be no structures, is no more tenable than that of Michael Grade, that structures are irrelevant and that the quality of writing depends only on 'talent'. But questions such as these were not directly confronted and could be raised only in the brief group discussions—discussions which

many of the guest speakers were apparently too busy to attend.

If the Manchester Symposium is not to be upstaged by the Edinburgh Television Festival, which is doing the same kind of thing with more money and razzamatazz, then it must introduce more rigour into the proceedings. The subject must be more closely defined and the speakers made to talk to it. As it was, I think I learnt more about the workings of popular entertainment on television (e.g. the interrelation between illusion and reality) from the tour offered us by Granada of the deserted, tatty but mysteriously glamorous set of *Coronation Street*.

EDWARD BUSCOMBE

A Walk Through Greenaway

There is no doubt who the British cinema's new folk hero is: Tulse Luper, ornithologist extraordinary, member of the IRR (Institute of Reclamation and Restoration) and apocryphal hero of British filmmaker Peter Greenaway's two most recent films. Greenaway's 40-minute surreal fantasy featuring Luper, *A Walk Through H*, was shown at last year's London Film Festival and extravagantly praised by many of us; it also jumped straight into two London critics' Top Ten for 1978.

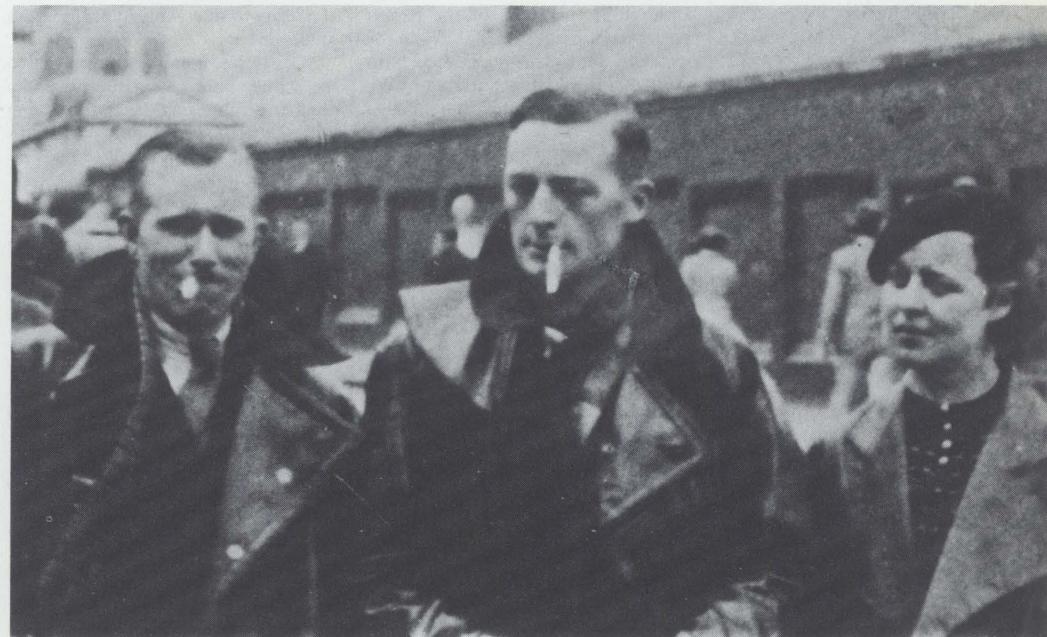
A glance at Greenaway's other films shows that *A Walk Through H* is no flash in the pan. The mixture of pedantry and poetry, of method and madness, that characterised that mythic journey through a series of brightly coloured maps pervades not only his earlier films (*Intervals*, *Windows*, *Dear Phone*, *H Is For House*) but also his newest work, *Vertical Features Remake*. The last named is another pastiche of bureaucratic delirium: this time an account of the IRR's attempt to collate research material left by Luper after his death and pertaining to the aesthetic-ecological significance of different vertical features (trees, posts, poles, etc.) in the English landscape.

An alumnus of the Walthamstow College of Art, Greenaway graduated first to a career at the Central Office of Information, where he worked directing and editing a series of documentaries designed to purvey the British way of life to foreign TV viewers. Eight years of making films in strict obeisance to propagandist formula took their toll—or possibly produced just the right climate of creative frustration. Certainly a love-hate relationship with institutionalism seems to fuel all or most of Greenaway's work. 'Maps and catalogues and systems fascinate me. They are all attempts to classify chaos. They try to demonstrate that there is an order and an objectivity in the world. What the IRR represents for me is the absurdity of this: it's an organisation that keeps revising the truth while each time pretending that the new version is definitive.

'My starting idea for *A Walk Through H* came when I found a collection of Ordnance Survey maps that had mistakes—roads going left instead of right, orchards painted blue instead of green. Here we are, it seemed, trying to define and circumscribe nature, and it's as if nature were sabotaging or satirising our attempts. In *A Walk Through H* "real" shots of birds keep interrupting the maps—to break up the artifice. What amazes me in seeing all my recent films in one session—which, in a preview theatre off Soho Square, we had just done—is the overpowering presence of nature, especially the omnipresent, lush English landscape.'

The English landscape is certainly present in his two best films prior to *A Walk Through H: Windows* (1973) and *H Is For House* (1974). In the first, we glimpse through a series of windows belonging to a house in the rural parish of 'W', gorgeous squares of spring countryside while a voice-off (Greenaway's own) solemnly and hilariously inventories recent deaths by defenestration. Energetic harpsichord music accompanies the film. 'I took it from Rameau's "The Hen", which I thought had just the right exuberant, manic insistence.'

Peter Greenaway's 'Vertical Features Remake'



In *H Is For House* shots of a country garden, and the green hills beyond, offer a visual focus while a voice—the unmistakably plummy tones of Colin Cantlie from *A Walk Through H*—pedagogically intones bits from a child's alphabet: 'H is for Hollywood, H is for home movies . . . etc.'

The fascination with academic methodicality which pervades Greenaway's work, sometimes in comic battle with its opposite—nature, spontaneity, instinct—sometimes standing alone, reaches fetishistic dimensions in *Vertical Features Remake*. 'I took the idea of a film made in protest by Tulse Luper about the deterioration of the English landscape. The premise is that Luper was himself working on a State Landscape Programme at the time of his death, and the IRR discovered this film and made various attempts to reshape it.'

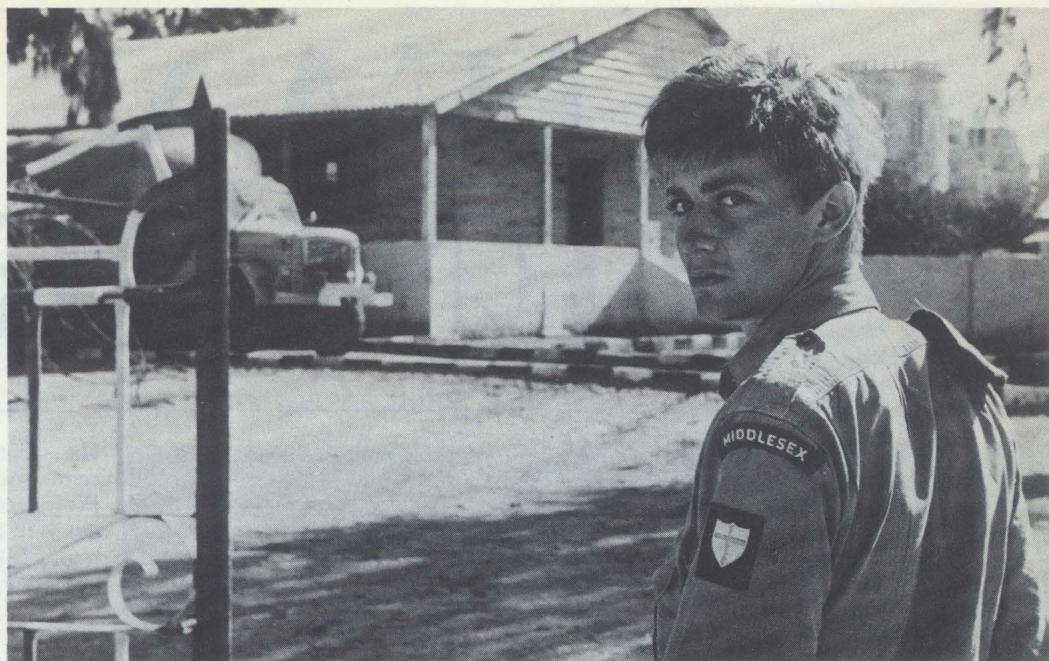
Each of these reshaping—Vertical Features Remake 1, VFR 2, VFR 3—is shown within Greenaway's larger film, and sandwiched between them are burlesque snippets (very funny) from the imaginary academic controversies that greeted each version. 'When I showed the film at the Riverside Studios,' Greenaway says, 'half with pleasure, half with surprise, everyone was breaking up with laughter.'

How much are his films made as absurdist impromptus, deliberately choosing minimal themes around which to spin a web of intellectual or bureaucratic complexity; and how much are they centred on subjects that Greenaway himself cares about? 'I care about the English landscape and about its vulnerability to sloppy or short-sighted "development". My earliest films, which I wouldn't dream of showing you and which I myself now watch with varying degrees of embarrassment, were very simple, sensuous, pictures of landscape features—sand, snow, sea—set to music: different kinds of music, from a Bach chorale to Brian Eno.'

'What I've tried to do in my films since is make them less simplified than that, less one-layered. Evoke nature by putting its opposite in the foreground—artifice. Also, my composer on *Vertical Features Remake* and *A Walk Through H* was Michael Nyman, and we've worked a lot together trying to evolve a system whereby the music and the visuals are created simultaneously and each has its own independent life. We've made up our own multi-media show—our "circus", we call it—and we've taken it to a lot of places in England and abroad: showing my paintings, playing his music, screening our films.'

Greenaway's bewilderingly prolix array of forthcoming projects includes *Goole By Numbers*, a film about the converted water tower near Hull in which Tulse Luper's *Vertical Features* film was allegedly found; a music-based collaboration with Michael Nyman called *Start With The Sea, Finish With Her Ear* (*Caesarea* for short); and a 3-hour, BFI-subsidised film called *The Falls*, featuring 92 biographies of 92 different people. Greenaway is also writing a complete biography of Tulse Luper in novel form. The mind boggles . . .

NIGEL ANDREWS



Youseff Chahine's 'Alexandria . . . Why?'

Berlin

The twenty-ninth Berlin Festival was bedevilled from the start. An attempt to jockey for a more advantageous date was frustrated, at the last moment and to Berlin's great financial cost and inconvenience, by the International Federation of Film Producers. It was not quite clear if this was a factor in the resignation of Dr. Wolf Donner, whose two years as director had brought a new surge of life to the event. Dr. Donner is to be succeeded by the joint directorship of Ulrich Gregor, creator of Berlin's parallel event, the Young Film Forum, and the British-born Moritz de Hadeln, whose years as director of the Locarno Festival brought a good deal of vitality to that event whilst striking terror in straiter-laced Locarno citizens.

A mere two days into the Festival came a crisis that turned the clock back to the days when Berlin, created in the Cold War years, neither acknowledged nor was acknowledged by the socialist world. The Soviet delegation had given warning that they would withdraw from the Festival if Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, which they regarded as an affront to the Vietnamese people, were shown. The Chinese invasion exacerbated the affair; and when the screening went ahead, the Russians walked out with their films, followed by the Hungarians, the Cubans, the Bulgarians, the East Germans and the Czechs. The jury was thus deprived of two members, Pál Gábor and Vera Chytílová. The Third World directors thought of going too, but eventually contented themselves with a stern protest.

The only East European film to be shown before the débâcle was the Hungarian *Stud Farm*, in which András Kovács reverts to the more formal narrative style of his *Cold Days*. The film is set in the Cold War and Stalinist era: the hero is a proletarian put in command of a stud farm near Hungary's western frontier, and trapped between the suspicion of the *ancien régime* sol-

ders who run the farm and the unpredictability of the authorities who have placed him there. It is correct, a little heavy, boasts a needlessly brutal scene of the wanton shooting of some dogs; and perhaps comes a bit too late to be a truly revealing historical analysis.

Officially withdrawn, Jiří Menzel's *The Marvellous Men with the Crank* was shown clandestinely. It is a frank retreat into nostalgia and prettiness, but irresistible for its highly decorative and authentic account of the adventures of a moving picture showman at the turn of the century. Menzel himself plays an owlish young cameraman in the first fine frenzy of the discovery of Art.

The Festival opened with Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*. The script, by Peter Matthesheimer and Pea Fröhlich, is good ironic Fassbinder material: Maria's wedding takes place in an air raid on Berlin, and lasts one night; man and wife are separated, first by his years posted missing at the front, then by a jail sentence for killing Maria's wartime lover (she actually did it herself), finally by an absence mutually agreed by Maria's new, rich, dying lover and benefactor. All obstacles finally removed, they are just about to proceed to a proper consummation and enjoyment of their legacies when a gas explosion does for them both. The elements—Hanna Schygulla's performance, the exactness of the period atmosphere, Fassbinder's customary precision of staging—are fine; but a new diffuseness and overweight seem to affect his work. It mars *In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden* also, despite the overall economy of the film, which is written, designed, photographed, directed and edited by Fassbinder and is virtually a solo by Volker Spengler as a transsexual in the final days of despair before suicide. The central character is so totally dispirited, unattractive, humourless and generally negative that the film's 129 minutes are hard going. The principal consolation is Ingrid Caven as the hero(ine)'s dim confidante.

The other major German film on show was Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu*. Herzog takes credit for the scenario—surprisingly, because the film is directly based, sometimes image for image and location for location, on Murnau's *Nosferatu*, pirated in its own turn from *Dracula*. The images, thanks to Murnau's inspiration and Jörg Schmitt-Reitwein's colour photography, are superb and Klaus Kinski is a melancholy Dracula; but Murnau and Max Schreck are still to be preferred.

This issue of SIGHT AND SOUND went to press before the Festival was halfway through. By that time we had had the French entry—Truffaut's further adventures of Antoine Doinel, tending to become a bore as we revisit his past in *L'Amour en Fuite*; and Jeanne Moreau's competent, unexceptional recollection of growing up on the eve of war, *L'Adolescente*. The United States had still *Movie Movie* and *Superman* to come. *The Deer Hunter*—American self-pity rather than self-examination over Vietnam—seemed as much overrated by the walkers-out as by its many admirers. Paul Schrader's *Hard Core* is a banal and meretricious melodrama about a father's search for his runaway daughter, caught up in the pornography industry.

Perhaps the most likeable competition film was the Egyptian Youseff Chahine's *Alexandria . . . Why?*. The limitations of its resources are obvious enough in technical roughness and carelessness over period detail; but it absorbs the idioms and preserves the vitality of a popular cinema, while offering a touching portrayal of a life and times. The young hero pursues his ambitions single-mindedly, while someone else's war goes on all round. Despite hatred and tension, Egyptian and English, Arab and Jew, against all the rules, still find the possibility to love one another. Chahine proves that sheer energy and generosity are not inconsiderable virtues.

DAVID ROBINSON

1894

JEAN RENOIR

1979



Jean Renoir

The awful thing about this world, you know, is that everybody has his reasons
—Octave in *La Règle du Jeu*

In the garden of my house in California there is an orange tree near the kitchen door. I gaze at it and I breathe in its perfume. It is covered with blossoms. I never see an orange tree in flower without thinking of Cagnes. And thinking of Cagnes immediately conjures up the figure of my father. For it was there that he spent the best of his last years, it was there that he died. At his home, 'Les Collettes', the scent of orange blossoms is still the same and the olive trees have not changed. The grass in particular makes me feel close to him—*Renoir, My Father*

My father loved to paint my hair, and his fondness for the golden ringlets which came down to my shoulders filled me with despair. At the age of six, and in spite of my trousers, many people mistook me for a girl. Street urchins ran jeering after me, calling me 'Mademoiselle' and asking what I had done with my skirt. I impatiently awaited the day when I was to enter the Collège de Sainte-Croix, where the regulations required a hairstyle more suited to middle-class ideals. To my great disappointment my father constantly postponed the date of my entry...

His scepticism where schooling was concerned was summed up as follows: 'In Protestant schools you become a pederast, but with the Catholics it's more likely to be masturbation. I prefer the latter'—*My Life and My Films*

□

My first experience of the cinema was in 1897. I was a little over two... Scarcely had we taken our seats than the room was plunged in darkness. A terrifying machine shot out a fearsome beam of light piercing the obscurity, and a series of incomprehensible pictures appeared on the screen, accompanied by the sound of a piano at one end and at the other end a sort of hammering that came from the machine. I yelled in my usual fashion and had to be taken out. I never thought that the staccato rhythm of the Maltese cross was later to become for me the sweetest of music... Gabrielle was sorry we had not stayed. The film was about a big river and she thought that in the corner of the screen she had glimpsed a crocodile—*My Life and My Films*

□

This was the year 1913, and the chamber-pot still prevailed in the great majority of French homes. Even among the very rich baths were still a rarity. We may as well be frank about it, those elegant bedrooms with their tasseled curtains, their lace and velvet, their pleated satins and other trimmings, smelt of urine. All the perfumes of Grasse were not enough to smother that odour, which was that of the nineteenth century. I imagine that earlier centuries were at least as smelly. But habit is everything, and nobody minded. Our modern motor-exhausts do not exactly smell of roses.

If we are to particularise about smells, I would say that the smell of the middle and upper classes before the 1914 war was one of 'shut-in-ness'—a smell of well-warmed, well-nourished bodies insulated against all extremes. That was my parents' smell, and it was that of the servants... I had been vaguely conscious of the smell of the working-class in brief encounters with tradespeople, farmworkers and men who came to do jobs in our house. It seemed to be mainly a smell of sweat, which at once fascinated and repelled me—*The Notebooks of Captain Georges*

□

I still feel a stirring of the blood at the memory of my finest moment as a cavalry-

man, the charge by the whole division which was the high-point of the manoeuvres . . . We swept forward with a noise of thunder, no longer our separate selves, no more than drops of water in a great wave roaring on to a beach. I had never known that supreme sense of belonging, the exaltation that filled my lungs. I did not exist, I was lost in that glorious whole. We seemed to be no longer on earth or even on horses. The men on either side, pressed by those beyond them, lurched into me so hard that they almost crushed my legs. I felt myself rising off the saddle, and never paused to wonder if I should come down again. I did not wonder about anything. I did not exist. I knew the matchless pleasure of non-thought—*The Notebooks of Captain Georges*

□

Naively and laboriously, I began by imitating my American masters . . . It was an enormous stroke of luck which, in 1924, took me to a cinema where they were showing a film by Erich von Stroheim. The film was *Foolish Wives* and it stunned me. I must have seen it at least ten times. Casting out my false gods, I realised how wrong I had been. Ceasing my foolish complaints about audiences and their so-called lack of comprehension, I began to see how I might reach them by filming authentic subjects in the tradition of French realism. I began to look around me and was amazed to discover a wealth of purely national elements perfectly suited to the screen. I began to understand that the gestures of a French laundress, of a woman combing her hair before a mirror, of a hawker with his barrow, often had incomparable plastic qualities. I began to make a sort of study of French gesture through the paintings of my father and his contemporaries. Then, armed with my new knowledge, I made *Nana*, the first of my films worth talking about—*Ecrits 1926-1971*

□

Toni has often been described as the forerunner of the Italian neo-realistic films. I do not think that is quite correct. The Italian films are magnificent dramatic productions, whereas in *Toni* I was at pains to avoid the dramatic. I attached as much importance to the countrywoman surprised while doing the washing as to the hero of the story . . . Now, after a lapse of time, when I can see things a little more clearly, I think I may say that what characterised *Toni* is the absence of any dominating element, whether star performer, setting or situation—*My Life and My Films*

□

La Bête Humaine strengthened my longing to achieve poetic realism. The steel mass of the locomotive became in my imagination the flying carpet of oriental fable—*My Life and My Films*

□

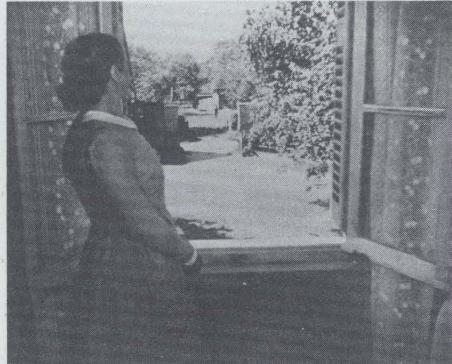
I needed a background [for the story of *La Règle du Jeu*]: it was the Sologne which provided me with the setting in which the actors were to discover the truth about the characters they were playing. Its mists took me back to the happy days of my childhood when Gabrielle and I went to the Théâtre Montmartre to be enthralled by *Jack*



'La Fille de l'Eau' (1924)



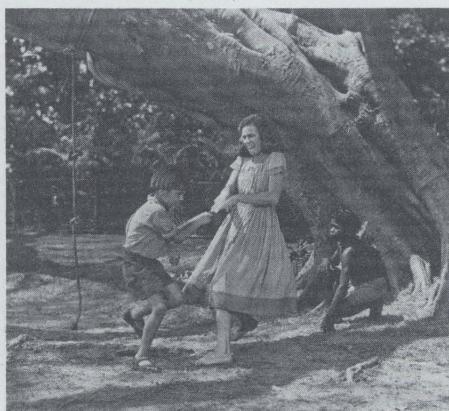
'Boudu Sauvé des Eaux' (1932)



'Madame Bovary' (1934)



Gabin and Jouvet in 'Les Bas Fonds' (1936).
Below: 'The River' (1951)



Sheppard, ou les Chevaliers du Brouillard. Nothing is more mysterious than a countryside emerging from fog. In that cotton-wool atmosphere the sound of gunshots is deadened. One expects to see will-o'-the-wisps emerging from every pool, or even the King of the Marshes himself. The Sologne is a region of marshes entirely devoted to hunting, a sport which I detest. I consider it an abominable exercise in cruelty. By situating my story amid these vapours, I gave myself the chance to depict a shooting party—*My Life and My Films*

□

Who is Eléna? That's easy, I have my own opinion about that. Eléna, I am certain, is Venus. She is Ingrid Bergman too, but above all she is Venus. From time to time Venus comes down to earth, as the gods of Olympus still do, even today. They like to remind us of certain vital truths. They like to remind us that the only thing that matters is beauty, the flesh, the eyes of a woman, the divine mystery of skin textures in the woman one loves. This is highly important, you know, the texture of skin in the woman you love, much more so than any theory. So it was that the other day I saw Venus, who had come down for a little visit, for a stroll in a Parisian street. And I stopped her and asked her if she would like to make a film. Fancies are so fugitive, and I would like to capture Venus on the screen: it would be pleasant to be able to refresh oneself from time to time with the reality of her features, the curve of her nose, the lobes of her ears. So Eléna is Venus, Venus with her golden hair, an exquisite gold, with tiny, deliciously foolish little hairs astray at the nape of the neck, so delightful that I wanted to touch but of course I didn't dare. And then the teeth too, the constant gaiety, this sort of gift of oneself. Even saying good morning, Venus seems to be giving of herself entirely. And so she is, the very antithesis of all those decadent sirens, those incitements to despair whom the devil has tried to palm off as fashionable—*Ecrits 1926-1971*

□

Renoir had succeeded in fulfilling the dreams of his whole life: 'to create riches with modest means'. From his palette, simplified to the last degree, and from the minute 'droppings' of colour lost on its surface, issued a splendour of dazzling golds and purples, the glow of flesh filled with young and healthy blood, the magic of all-conquering light, and, towering above all these material elements, the serenity of a man approaching supreme knowledge. He now dominated Nature, which all his life he had served as a worshipper. In return she had finally taught him to see beyond surface appearances and, like herself, to create a world out of almost nothing—*Renoir, My Father*

□

I enjoy repeating myself. One gets interested—apropos *Le Petit Théâtre de Jean Renoir*

Extracts chosen by Tom Milne. Renoir, My Father, My Life and My Films and The Notebooks of Captain Georges are all published in Britain by William Collins.

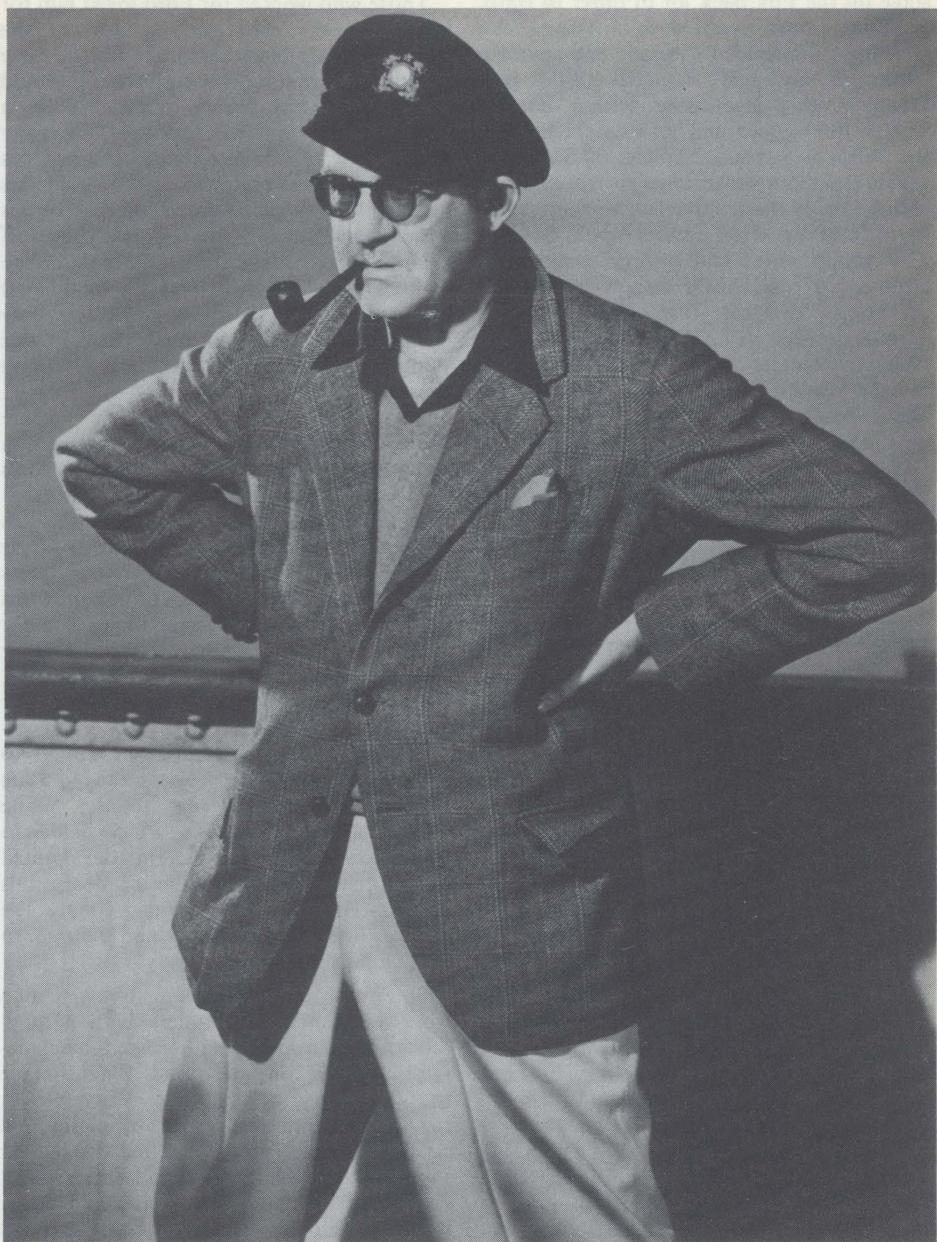




'Ford used his unpredictability of dress as another of his weapons of authority . . .' Above: with Georges Schreiber and the portrait painted at the time of 'The Long Voyage Home'

JOHN FORD

Andrew Sinclair



John Ford had a lifelong involvement with the U.S. navy. In 1917 he was rejected for naval duty because of his poor eyesight, but applied to become a photographer in the newly formed Naval Flying Corps. In 1966, when he was over seventy, the navy asked him to do a tour of duty, offering a choice between the Mediterranean and 'a place called Vietnam'. And when Ford was dying, Richard Nixon gave him the rank of admiral. Film critics have tended to treat this other life as part of the great Ford legend, not looking too closely at the details. Now the balance has been righted in a fascinating and valuable book by Andrew Sinclair, *John Ford*, published by the Dial Press/James Wade in the United States and to be published later this year here by Allen and Unwin. Sinclair considers Ford's films in relation to his life, and both as they relate to his role of teaching his countrymen their own history.

As early as the mid-20s, Sinclair says, 'Ford had begun his double life, both as a filmmaker and as a navy spy.' He was an officer in the naval reserve, but 'his intelligence activities were unpaid and performed largely on his own initiative because American military intelligence between the two world wars was unauthorised by Congress and largely run by a small sub-culture of army and navy officers deeply worried about their country's lack of security and unpreparedness for war.' Ford's voyage across the Pacific, ostensibly researching for the submarine film *Men Without Women* (1930), was also undertaken in the interests of naval intelli-

gence; and there were other such trips. In the 30s, cruises closer to home in Ford's yacht *The Araner* included counter-intelligence work checking on Japanese activities along America's Pacific coast. By 1940, when the United States was preparing for war, Ford went a long stage further, organising 'a private combat group of technicians' and trying to find Washington support for its work.

At first, he obtained permission to set up a historical unit in the Naval Reserve, which eventually mustered 35 officers and 175 enlisted men. 'Working with borrowed equipment, it met once a week on a vacant

stage on the Fox back lot in order to train. . . . Ford wanted everyone to be able to take over from a wounded comrade and record a battle on his own.' Colonel 'Wild Bill' Donovan was meanwhile setting up the foreign intelligence unit that would become the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.). 'He began making arrangements to recruit Ford with his ready-made surveillance group under the title of the Field Photographic Branch. This group never had a precise directive, although it was chiefly responsible for all operations overseas that needed photographic records . . . it had fifteen complete film crews and its own processing laboratory in the South Agriculture building on December 7, 1941.'

On that day 'an act of war made Ford's clandestine commitment to the navy become his public service.' What follows, slightly condensed for publication here, is Andrew Sinclair's account of how John Ford and the Field Photographic Branch went to war.

Ford's four war years used his powers at full stretch. His professional skills made him adept at developing new reconnaissance equipment and getting back excellent documentary footage. His inherited talent for politics was essential in dealing with a difficult President of the United States, a jealous navy and a host of competitive intelligence agencies. His gifts for command had to be spread thin across the globe, forcing him to pick good aides and devolve control to them. He had always been brilliant at picking a film crew and cast, and he showed the same uncanny instinct at choosing the right field officers. The young Mark Armistead, for instance, found himself abandoned by Ford to run the Field Photographic Branch in England for two years on his own. His only instructions were ambiguous, 'Do a good job for the O.S.S. and the navy.' Ford believed in giving local commanders total authority as long as they were successful. He was not interested in their failure any more than his own.

Those who worked for Ford loved him for breaking every rule, just as most of the regular military brass hated him for the same reason. 'He never wore a uniform if he could help it,' one of his friends recalls. 'He fell in love with the baseball cap the U.S. navy wears. Yet he could be just as grand as anyone in full uniform.' Ford used his unpredictability of dress as another of his weapons of authority. He kept everybody off balance by his usual disreputable look, before making a sudden switch to the braid and brass of a full navy Captain. He was only upstaged once in the war, by the British Orde Wingate, who received him stark naked in Burma.

The Field Photographic Branch's fifteen film crews were rapidly deployed across the world to do aerial reconnaissance, report combat operations or make training films such as *How to Operate Behind Enemy Lines* or *Living Off the Land*. Ford even had one of his crews in Hawaii six days after the attack on Pearl Harbor in order to find out the reason for American unpreparedness. He and the newly commissioned General Donovan, however, particularly wanted to test the limits of their authority at home. So he sent out his ex-editor Robert Parrish with a petty officer to make a photographic report on the old State Department building next to the White House. Officially, the O.S.S. was forbidden to engage in intelligence within the United States, but Ford wanted to challenge this presidential directive and also annoy the desk-bound admirals, who had refused to include his outfit in their navy.

So Parrish and his assistant shot some film from a Cunningham camera with a long-focus lens that looked rather like a machine-gun mounted on its tripod. The footage showed the Marine guards on duty playing cards, then running about in panic and confusion once they had spotted the camera shooting at them. Parrish and his assistant ended up in detention cells and were brought for court martial in front of Ford and a Marine Corps captain. Ford said that the footage was excellent and showed

exactly how well the Marines were guarding important government buildings. The uneasy Marine captain recommended that the court martial charges be dropped. Ford used the footage as proof that the O.S.S. should be allowed to operate within the United States to preserve security, but President Roosevelt stayed firm. Ford's men should only work overseas, where they might be less embarrassing.

Ford, however, soon won over the President and many of the admirals in Washington. He would arrange showings of his best and more patriotic movies for the White House and for the top navy brass. He would attend the showings, pretending that he had never seen the final film because he had always been too busy working on another one. He would then wipe away a tear at the end of the screening of *Young Mr. Lincoln* or *The Long Voyage Home* and say to the assembled dignitaries, 'I'm glad I waited until I could see it with you.*

This was a politic performance, but he won the respect of the President by an act of personal heroism. Naval Intelligence expected the Japanese to assault the American-held Midway Island in May 1942. Ford flew there with a cameraman to film the defence. The Japanese codes had been broken and the Americans knew where the enemy was going to attack. So Ford was waiting for the assault on the naval air station.

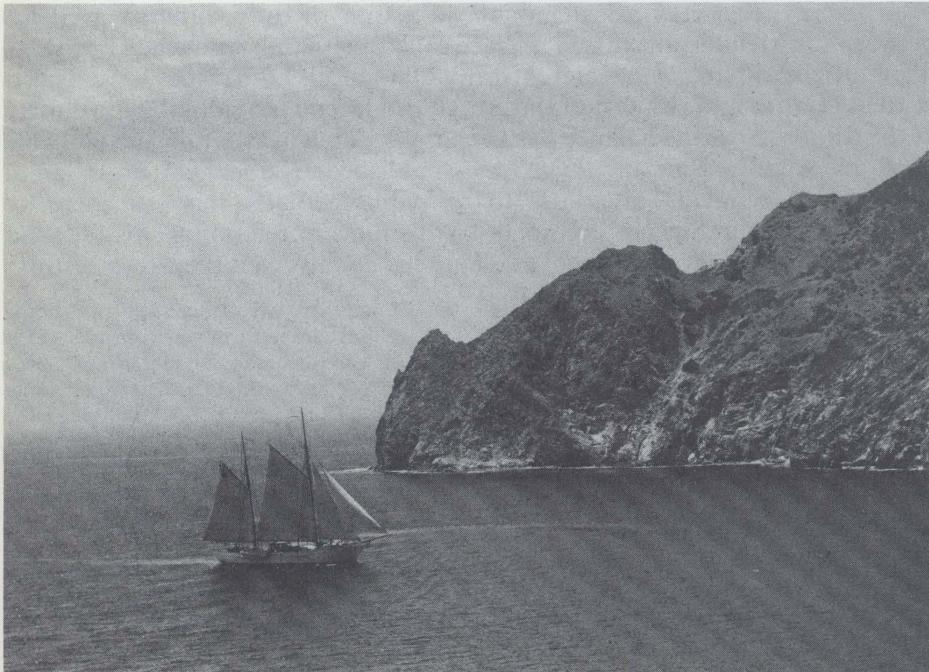
As a boy, he had watched from the Portland observatory the first military flights over the army and navy camps and the forts flying the American flag in Casco Bay. Now from the exposed top of the power plant in Midway he recorded a boyhood dream of heroism, the raising of the flag by blue jackets in the middle of shot and shell. He was wounded himself in the left arm.

Ford's shot of the raising of the flag on Midway was the synthesis of his life. He had been blown up as a young stuntman in his brother's serial wars, he had rehearsed battle scenes in his own films and recorded them on set. His sense of the dramatic and his patriotism had also taken him into surveillance work for the navy. Now he had actually been hit in combat and filmed a scene of the navy's courage under fire that would have seemed excessive in one of his own movies. The flag in the documentary of *The Battle of Midway* is hoisted as if the military personnel were extras under fire in their wooden fort in *Drums Along the Mohawk* or cavalrymen holding their banner high in the charge in *Stagecoach*. The heroism of Ford's American movies had already taught his country's soldiers and sailors the form of brave acts. If they now did these and Ford recorded them in actual war, they had been inspired and he had learned his skills from Hollywood artifice. At the battle of Midway, illusion and fact were one.

Ford treated his footage from Midway like a personal statement. He hid it from the navy and arranged for Robert Parrish to edit it secretly in a Hollywood cutting room under armed guard. Parrish asked Ford if he wanted a documentary or a propaganda film, but Ford ducked the question and answered that he wanted to show the mothers of America that their country was beginning to hit back against the enemy.

* See Robert Parrish, *Growing Up in Hollywood* (London, 1976).

Ford's yacht, 'The Araner', which he used on counter-intelligence work before the war



Ford then called in the radical writer Dudley Nichols and the reactionary James McGuinness to do two alternative scripts. He recorded parts of each script with his favourite available stars—Henry Fonda was one of them. The background music was to be his darling folk and patriotic songs from 'Red River Valley' through 'America' and 'Anchors Aweigh' to the Marine Hymn. Each of the four armed services had to have the same amount of footage cut into the film to prevent any jealousy among them about their role in the victory at Midway. Secrecy was paramount, in case the footage might be seized by one of the rival services and never released.

Parrish did his editing job and Ford made a final clever addition. He produced a close-up of the President's son, Major James Roosevelt of the Marine Corps, at the salute on Midway Island. Although the major had not been there officially during the battle, Ford cut him in at the moment when the flag-draped coffins of the American dead were slipping into the ocean off the sterns of the PT boats. When the President saw the film along with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he showed little interest until he saw his son saluting the sea burial of the brave. Then he said, 'I want every mother in America to see this picture.' Five hundred prints were made, and many American mothers did see Ford's picture and the President's son.*

So Ford won over Roosevelt through his courage and his diplomacy. He even had private dinners with the President in the White House and was impressed by Roosevelt's bravery in coping with his paralysis and his wheel chair. This presidential admiration was increased by Ford flying in the Doolittle squadron on the Tokyo raid in order to make a film on the aerial counterattack on the heart of Japan. Ford did not like being shot without reprisal. He also took part in the raids on Marcus Island and Wotje Atoll, so expensive in American lives. He saw how bloody it would be to take back the Pacific Islands, so easily lost because the American high command had not been prepared before the war.

This preoccupation made him lose Roosevelt's support. He remained particularly angry at the navy's failure to guard against the initial disaster at Pearl Harbor despite his warnings. So he had cut together from material collected by Gregg Toland a two-hour documentary called *December 7th*, showing in detail the slipshod precautions and glaring mistakes that had allowed the Japanese surprise attack to be so successful.

One of Ford's action cameramen, Brick Marquard, saw the full documentary before it was suppressed. 'It was political dynamite,' he says. 'It showed the cause and effect of Pearl Harbor, the total carelessness.' When it was viewed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and reported to the President, it led to a directive from the White House that all Field Photographic Branch material was to be controlled and censored in case it had a bad effect on national morale. *December 7th* finally appeared as a 20-minute short film and won another Academy Award for Ford, although its final shape was almost as

innocuous and routine as the other Branch documentaries like *We Sail at Midnight*, an account of the merchant marine in war zones.

Ford had never been popular with the high command of the Atlantic Fleet. He was disliked for his wilfulness and disrespect for authority. He would often fail to appear at important meetings of the heads of the O.S.S. branches with the Washington admirals and generals in charge of European operations. The furore over *December 7th* gave them their chance to move against him.

He was sent out to cover the invasion of North Africa with ten of his combat film crews. In Algiers, he met up again with Darryl Zanuck, now a colonel in the Signal Corps. 'Can't I ever get away from you?' Ford complained. 'I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut that if I ever go to Heaven, you'll be waiting at the door for me under a sign reading Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck.'

Ford and Zanuck formed an advance outfit for the attack. Once they were far in front of the lines in Zanuck's personal blue Chevrolet, which he had commandeered in Algeria. They found a beautiful old church, which they thought would make a significant background shot if the German artillery did not destroy it first. Ford had run out of cigars and demanded that Zanuck share his last one with him. 'I'm not a Catholic,' Zanuck said, 'but you are. And what greater place for a Catholic to get killed than in a Catholic church?' So Ford walked towards the church with a camera, just as a bomb landed near them. The camera was destroyed, but he and Zanuck picked themselves up, more or less in one piece, at the bottom of a cliff. 'Did it hurt the cigar?' Ford asked.†

His North African adventure only lasted two months, and Ford found himself still out of favour in Washington. He was recalled to New York, then put on a slow boat to Calcutta. It seemed to be a calculated slight—

*See Mel Gussow, *Don't Say Yes Until I Finish Talking: A Biography of Darryl F. Zanuck* (New York, 1971).

Trophies at the Field Photo Farm, set up by Ford after the war as a club for O.S.S. veterans. 'It was,' says Andrew Sinclair, 'his last command'



*For a full account of the editing of *Battle of Midway*, see Robert Parrish, *Growing Up in Hollywood*. Ford won a special Oscar for the film he made from the footage.

a forced long voyage away to avoid official censure. For the head of an important section of the O.S.S. to spend nearly two months on an unescorted munitions ship ambling towards the Far East would have been an improbable mission, if Ford had not been directed by Donovan himself to lie low until the heat was off him. The freighter left New York on September 19, 1943 and took 55 days to reach Calcutta, calling on the way at Cuba and Australia and Ceylon. One of the combat cameramen on the voyage, Jack Swain, said that none of Ford's men could understand why they had to cross the Pacific that way. Flying would have taken them less than a week. 'We didn't know if we were top dog,' Swain said, 'or lost.'

Ford went with his camera crews up to Nazira in Assam, and then proceeded to the Burma front. He turned his men over to Carl Eifler, Colonel in command of the O.S.S. in the Far East. Eifler's biography, *The Deadliest Colonel*, confirms the rumour that Washington was glad to ship Ford off to the battle lines, where he might rub against the enemy and do some damage to them instead of rubbing the top brass the wrong way at home. There were also political reasons behind Ford's mission to the Far East. Large appropriations had been voted to the O.S.S., and Congress wanted to see some vivid proof of action to justify its outlay from the public purse. Eifler was a daredevil and his men were engaged in a desperate jungle campaign. Ford's cameramen could record that and send the film back. Eifler himself was soon to be recalled to Washington to present the documentaries that showed the O.S.S. ambushes of the Japanese and the brutal survival war behind the lines. With such evidence before its eyes, Congress could approve in safety the courage and casualties bought by its vote.

After Burma, Ford himself proceeded to Chungking to check on the Field Photographic Branch on the Chinese front. The first camera crew dropped by supply planes had all been killed. Ford had to

replace the dead men with more crews, flown in to make propaganda films about the efforts of General Stilwell's forgotten army fighting for Chiang Kai-shek. These documentaries were also used to try to influence the military and Congress at home to send more reinforcements and supplies to China.

Ford then moved back to organise his men and record with them the American counter-attack across the Pacific. Wherever the armed services were pressing the Japanese early in 1944, Ford or his cameramen were there. The footage was so excellent that Ford found himself popular again in Washington, which had found other scapegoats in his absence on the war fronts. He was pulled back by Donovan to return to Europe and become 'the official eye of the American high command' on D-Day.

In London Mark Armistead had set up an operation on his own. A secret laboratory was installed at Denham Studios for developing classified film stock, which could also be edited and projected there. Armistead and his men had made various documentaries before 1944, including one on the North African invasion called *Dunkirk in Reverse*, which was suppressed for security reasons. His first important job was to fill a surprising gap in British intelligence work. Incredibly, the War Office had no detailed maps of the Normandy beaches where the Allied armada intended to land—only a few picture postcards and reports from holiday-makers.

Armistead began to develop with Gerald Juran an aerial reconnaissance technique which was called 'low-level-oblique'. All the French coastline on the Channel was covered by a series of photographs, shot from fixed cameras flying at a height of two hundred feet above the ground. As the height and the shooting angle were fixed, the size of buildings or blockhouses and the width of piers or bridges could easily be calculated from the developed photographs. So precise were the images that the depth of rocks under the sea could also be estimated.

Low-level-oblique reconnaissance provided the data for the invasion maps of the Normandy beaches. Armistead also arranged for five hundred clockwork Eymo cameras to be mounted on the front of landing craft, so that the mechanism would be triggered by the ramp going down on the beach. With this device, five hundred takes of the troops charging into France would actually be shot, each providing four minutes of film. No cameraman needed to be present; the clockwork would do the job.

At this point, Ford turned up in London and took over after two years of absence. 'I'm in command,' he told Armistead. 'You're second. I'll take the toughest spot, you take the second toughest spot.' Actually, the toughest spots were assigned to two cameramen, Brick Marquard and Junius Stout, who were specially chosen by Ford to go in with the Rangers on the day before the main invasion, so they could pick good camera positions to film the major assault. In fact, Ford had set up his cameramen *before* D-Day even began, making them choose their angles and 'whatever cover we could get'. Ford could not allow the largest landing in military history to occur without putting his cameras in place.

He already knew where he would put himself after D-Day. He had arranged to

meet the most decorated man in the whole U.S. navy, Commander John D. Bulkeley, hero of the fighting retreat of a squadron of six PT boats during the Japanese conquest of the Philippines. Ever since an account of Bulkeley's exploits had appeared under the title of *They Were Expendable*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had been pestering Ford to make a film about him. So Ford had both his careers in mind when he arranged for Bulkeley to take him across the Channel in a PT boat before D-Day. He needed to complement Armistead's maps with an intelligence report from the Bayeux area, and Bulkeley was delighted to take him there personally. 'We used to go back and forth,' Ford said later. 'We'd go in there on one engine, drop an agent off or pick up information, and disappear.'* Once he asked another Hollywood director at war, George Stevens, what he wanted from Occupied France. 'Two bottles of booze,' Stevens said. He received them the next day.

After a brief spell on the cruiser *Augustus* to take advantage of its superior communications system, Ford transferred to Bulkeley's PT boat for the rest of the Normandy landing. They became close friends. Once again Ford met the real McCoy, the man who had fought what Ford would film. In the theatre of war off the Normandy beaches, Ford met the hero of his next drama for the theatres of America.

On Omaha Beach, Marquard and Stout were filming extraordinary footage of the first days of the invasion, some on colour stock. One day, Marquard heard his name shouted over the Beachmaster's bullhorn. 'There's a crazy guy out there on a PT boat,' the Beachmaster told Marquard, 'who wants to know how you are—and get your ass back to England with the stuff.' So Marquard put together the footage and brought it back to Portsmouth, receiving a Silver Star for his trouble. He saw some of his film on the British newsreels the following week, but most of his material was impounded and disappeared because of Roosevelt's restraining order on material shot by the Field Photographic Branch. To risk one's life was not enough: the military censor had the last word.

Ford was only to be in one more theatre of war before Hollywood dramas claimed him back. His new intimacy with Bulkeley led him on a PT boat operation to support the Yugoslav partisans, who were increasingly falling under the control of Tito. Ford was anti-Communist and supported Tito's rival Mikhailovich, but the émigré leaders were hopeless and British intelligence was antagonistic. The whole operation was 'too full of lousy Oxford dons and aristocracy,' Ford said later. 'Princes and dukes and God knows what kind of White Russians.' Ford was offended that such people should claim to liberate or lead 'the proud, brave people of Yugoslavia'.†

It may well have been this new quarrel with the Allied high command in Europe that made James T. Forrestal himself, the Irish-American Secretary of the Navy, detail Ford to make a film about Bulkeley and the PT

* See Peter Bogdanovich, *John Ford* (Berkeley, 1968).

† Quoted in an unpublished interview by Robert Emmett Ginna Jr.

boats. Victory in Europe was already probable, with the Allies advancing quickly through France and the Russians through Eastern Europe. In the Pacific, however, the cost of reconquering the islands won by the Japanese in 1942 was proving high, and the American public did not understand why so many lives and so much time were necessary to regain what had been lost in a matter of months.

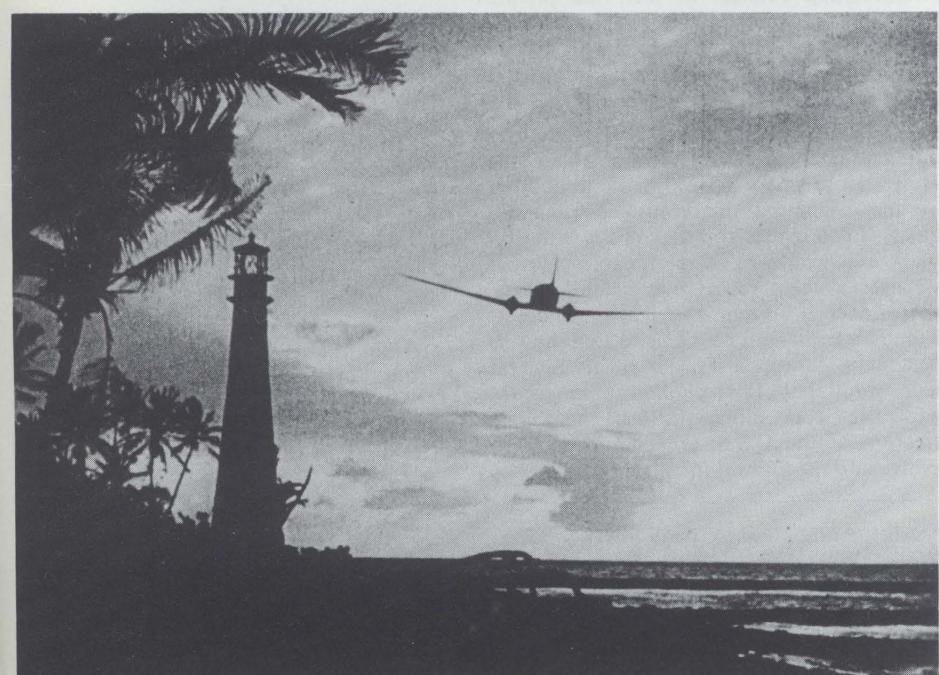
Ford shared popular opinion. The shame of the American defeats after Pearl Harbor had prompted his version of the disaster, *December 7th*, and his disgrace in Washington. Much of his men's best material from the war had been impounded or censored or disappeared due to Roosevelt's directive and the bickering of the armed services. Although the Hollywood system imposed its own censorship, it followed the box office, not the propaganda line. When Captain Ford, U.S.N.R., was ordered to leave active duty and make a Hollywood film to boost public morale over the fighting in the Pacific, he decided to use it as a vehicle for his own suppressed opinions about the failure of the prewar military leadership.

Ostensibly, *They Were Expendable* was the story of John Bulkeley's heroic last-ditch stand against the Japanese and his evacuation of General MacArthur from the Philippines in the nick of time. If Bulkeley (Robert Montgomery) was the primary hero of the film along with his second-in-command, played by John Wayne, General MacArthur played the role of superhero and semi-divine presence. Ford was to be so impressed by MacArthur on a later mission to Korea that he would demand an autograph for the first and last time in his life, imitating the young sailor in a PT boat who asks the MacArthur figure to sign his navy cap.

In the script of *They Were Expendable*, which Ford wrote with his old friend Commander Frank Wead in 1944, the film was to end with MacArthur leading the reconquest of the Philippines and saying to the PT boat commander on Leyte, 'It's wonderful having you here.' But the film was not shown until a year later, when victory had already been won against Japan. This stood the release print of *They Were Expendable* on its head. Instead of starting with a heroic retreat and ending with a march of triumph, it started with the victorious MacArthur trying to make Americans remember the forgotten warriors who had been unnecessarily wasted in the first disasters in the Pacific. The progress of the war itself had made the purpose of the picture expendable.

So the passage of time and the final inversion in the release print made *They Were Expendable* seem out of date and even subversive. The film now began with a recent quotation from the conquering MacArthur, which could not have been in the original script: 'Today the guns are silent. A great tragedy has ended. A great victory has been won. I speak for the thousands of silent lips, forever stilled among the jungles and in the deep waters of the Pacific which marked the way.'

So MacArthur's words in victory already relegated into time past the meaning of the film Ford shot off Miami late in 1944, while the slow Pacific war was still continuing. The following title, superimposed on a shot of torpedo boats racing across sunny seas, also had a sense of Christian destiny and recall:



'Manila Bay in the Year of Our Lord 1941'. God's will in MacArthur's triumph had been superimposed on to a personal statement by Ford that could well seem defeatist in its resignation to the hidden motives and apparent idiocy of orders from the high command that had to be obeyed. 'We little guys,' one of Ford's characters is made to say, 'the ones who are expended—never get to see the broad picture of the war, never find out the reasons back of the moves or failures to move. We only see our part—look up through the palm trees at the seamy side of it.'

Ford himself had seen something of the broad picture of the war, but he had not usually liked what he had seen. He had obeyed orders because he had always been a professional, both in the studio and in uniform. In the most significant speech in *They Were Expendable*, the admiral says to the PT boat commander, 'Listen, son. You and I are professionals. If the manager says sacrifice . . . our job is to lay down that sacrifice. That's what we were trained for, and that's what we'll do.'

Yet Ford remained a populist at heart and a fierce defender of his men. He wanted to show in *They Were Expendable* the tragedy of wasting the lives of brave people through unpreparedness and bad judgment. The sudden victory over Japan may have altered the significance of the script as official propaganda. In a sense, the dropping of two atomic bombs made all acts of individual heroism pointless. But Ford had still made his rebellious statement about the tragedy of individuals sacrificed at the hands of an inscrutable high command whose judgment was suspect, outside of the person of the godlike MacArthur.

The actual PT boats begin the film, despised by traditional navy people as a plywood dream of speedy crackerboxes. The news of the disaster at Pearl Harbor comes to their Commander Brickley—played by Robert Montgomery, a PT boat captain who was taken off duty like Ford was and ordered to play the role of the actual John Bulkeley. In the film, Brickley has to listen to a chorus of disbelief that the Pacific command could have been caught so unprepared. The script calls for 'Voices' to ask all the unpleasant questions Ford had tried to ask in the original version of *December 7th*: 'How did they get in undetected?' . . . 'Where were our search planes?' . . . 'What about our carriers?' . . . 'They're set to invade the West Coast now.' . . . 'And they got away scot-free.' Brickley tells his second-in-command, Ryan, that Pearl Harbor was 'the worst naval disaster since the Spanish Armada.'

In the final version of the film, an immediate Japanese air attack destroys the American naval base at Cavite—Ford took advantage of a coastal brush fire to shoot the background of burning Manila. The six PT boats put to sea and shoot down three Japanese bombers. Hourly they expect support from the American Asiatic Fleet and air force, but none comes. At first, the local admiral misuses them as messenger boys, then loses them on death or glory sorties against the invaders. Interestingly enough, Ford does not treat the Japanese as cruel Orientals, but as the avengers of American

'They Were Expendable': 'the forgotten warriors . . . wasted in the first disasters in the Pacific'

carelessness, as invisible outside their machines of war as the lethal Arabs in *The Lost Patrol* or the menacing Apaches before their attack in *Stagecoach*.

The PT boats prove their worth, knocking out a small aircraft carrier, a cruiser, troop transports and barges. Finally, the surviving three boats are detailed to carry the MacArthur figure and his staff back towards a safe island, so that he can command the regrouping and counterattack of the American forces. In an ironical final action, another Japanese cruiser is destroyed and Brickley's last PT boat is taken to pieces and put on the back of a truck to serve on an inland lake. All acts of personal bravery end in accepting stupid orders because sailors are ultimately professionals.

Because of their success with their squadron, Brickley and Ryan and two young ensigns are unexpectedly flown out with MacArthur in order to supervise the building of a fleet of PT boats. Their salvation at the last minute comes at the price of abandoning their heroic crews to death or imprisonment. In the original script by Wead and Ford, Brickley and Ryan feel like 'a fine pair of heels' when they are ordered to leave their men. 'We should have been Hawaiian musicians,' Brickley says. 'All we've done in this war is say goodbye.' But when Ryan tries to leave the aeroplane and rejoin his men, Brickley asks him, 'Who are you working for? Yourself?' Ryan obeys orders and saves himself.

So Wead and Ford felt themselves. Although crippled, Wead had arranged to be returned to service aboard the pocket carriers which he had helped to conceive, while Ford had been with his combat camera crews. They felt expended in being ordered to make *They Were Expendable*. But in the final release print Brickley's bitter farewell to his men has been cut. He no longer takes off in a Flying Fortress, making a sad check-list of the men he has had to leave behind him, but roars away over the abandoned crews to the strains of 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' on the soundtrack, while MacArthur's famous words of defiance are echoed and superimposed, 'We Shall Return'.

Ford's private message about valiant self-sacrifice for inscrutable commands is inverted and then perverted by the film's beginning and end, added by the studio in the flush and forgetfulness of total victory. Yet the film remains to haunt us with its realism and its images. Ford had now served with the navy on its little boats. He knew the sailors' conversation, its understatement and its banter. He allied the small talk of men at war to his sense of ritual and his brooding eye.

While Ford was detached to make a personal and official statement about the war in Hollywood, the Field Photographic Branch in Europe was engaged on official and clandestine missions. Most of the cameramen travelled with the American forces, shooting footage for newsreels or archives and examining the effects of the thousand bomber raids on German factories and communications. Wherever they went, they made a record of the devastation. Two assignments were particularly important, one overt and one secret. Robert Parrish worked on the first, Mark Armistead on the second. Both have left accounts of this strange final year of Ford's technicians at war.

Parrish and Budd Schulberg and other members of Ford's group were to try to find photographic evidence against the Nazi war criminals indicted at the Nuremberg Trials. They searched through the shambles of Germany in 1945, looking for the scarce footage of the Nazi leaders that had not been burned. They soon realised that the Russians had seized most of the film clips of the torture and execution of the conspirators against Hitler in the July plot of 1944. They were making no progress with the Russian liaison officer until they began talking about their commanding officer. The Russian happened to be a devotee of Ford's films and immediately handed over thirty thousand feet of vital documentary material in homage to Ford's work. This evidence was used at the Nuremberg Trials, which were also photographed by Ford's cameramen.*

The American conquest of most of Europe, which was called a liberation, gave Mark Armistead a chance to use his new aerial reconnaissance technique. After all, who knew when the American military machine might not be forced to intervene in Europe for the third time? Armistead went to Colonel David K. E. Bruce, then Chief of Operations for the O.S.S. in Europe, and secured from him an unofficial authorisation to proceed.

Armistead began to borrow airplanes from anyone who had one to spare. He secured a Grumman Goose from Admiral Wilkes, and also borrowed a B-26 bomber and three other war planes—all officially 'lost in John Ford's air force'. Actually, Ford knew nothing about his new squadron because he was making *They Were Expendable*. On his own initiative, Armistead set up an air base and laboratory at the French village of Coutainville and an official headquarters for the Field Reconnaissance Branch at the luxury Gestapo headquarters in the Avenue de la Belle Gabrielle in Paris.

The Allies thought Armistead's reconnaissance planes were photographing Europe to help the repair work on devastated cities and communications. He was even to receive the Croix de Guerre for turning over copies of his low-level-oblique photography to the Gaullist government in order to aid them in rehabilitating France. In fact, the private Ford air force was supplying to the American high command photographic details of the ports and coastlines and communications and military bases of Western Europe.†

The value of this work to American military intelligence was inestimable. One American brigadier-general wrote to another at the beginning of Armistead's surveillance, 'I can assure you that this is beautiful work and would be of inestimable value, if we ever have to repeat our last few years' performance again.'‡ The Supreme Commander in Europe, General Eisenhower, personally informed Ford's chief, General Donovan, that this photographic reconnaissance work alone justified the whole creation of the O.S.S. (which was later to evolve into the Central Intelligence Agency).

* Robert Parrish, *Growing Up in Hollywood*.

† From an interview with Mark Armistead. I am most grateful to him for revealing the secret acts of some of Ford's men at the end of the Second World War.

‡ Brigadier General G. Bryan Conrad to Brigadier General Edwin L. Sibert, June 21 1945.

Early in 1945, Ford returned to Europe to find out what his men had been doing on their own initiative. He wanted to make a long documentary about the Nuremberg Trials, from the reams of excellent footage, but the material seemed damaging to future relations with West Germany. As for Armistead's work, Ford had to save his subordinate from a court martial when some of the Allied governments began to suspect what 'John Ford's air force' was actually doing. Before he was stopped, Armistead had already begun on low-level-oblique surveillance of Russian-held Eastern Europe. It was a beginning of the overflights that would lead to Gary Powers' crash in the U-2 and the satellite eyes forever spying from outer space. If Ford did not approve of the surveillance of friendly countries, he did defend his man. That was his nature.

Ford's final duty was to oversee the demobilisation of the Field Photographic Branch. The camera equipment and aerial photographic techniques developed by the Branch were taken over by the American air force and later by the Central Intelligence Agency. Ford rightly took the credit for the achievements of the Field Photographic Branch. He had chosen his technicians, worked with them on many of their projects, and given them local control during his necessary absences. He was responsible for their mistakes as well as their successes, and he never deserted his own men. For his four years of exemplary service he was awarded the Legion of Merit.

'In a sense, the war would never be over for John Ford,' says Andrew Sinclair. He was on active service again a few years later in Korea, and involved in an episode so extravagant and symbolic that it seems a fitting epilogue to this extract from Sinclair's book:

Ford asked whether the *Missouri*, 'Mighty Mo', had ever fired all of her sixteen-inch guns in one broadside and in one direction. The vice-admiral [in command of the *Missouri*] replied that no American battleship had ever done that, for fear that the recoil would make the ship turn turtle . . . 'Wouldn't you like to know anyway?' Ford asked . . . The next day a target was selected somewhere on the mainland of Asia, and all the huge guns of the 'Mighty Mo' were trained on it. Ford and Armistead wisely rose from the battleship in a helicopter and turned their cameras on the target below. 'Roll 'em,' Ford said on the radio.

The *Missouri* fired her thundering broadside into Korea. The battleship rocked sideways on the recoil, heeling nearly halfway over, until her starboard decks were awash. Then she righted herself, shaking off the water like the Leviathan she was. Armistead got the shot, Ford had a climax for his film [*This is Korea!*], the vice-admiral settled a navy puzzle, and somewhere in Asia there was a series of vast explosions.

. . . From his high observatory, as a child, Ford had seen the coming of the American dreadnought. From his helicopter, as an ageing man, he saw one of the last few battleships in the navy firing vainly towards Asia. Soon they would prove useless and be scrapped or retired, the last one returning from mothballs to serve vainly off Vietnam.

MELMOTH IN NORMAN ROCKWELL LAND...

on 'The Night
of the Hunter'



Robert Mitchum: listening for a voice

I'm not alone, I know, in flying a flag for *The Night of the Hunter*, actor Charles Laughton's only film as director. The film's a freak, an anomaly, an oasis. Since my first viewing years ago, its convulsive beauty, moral ambiguity and hyperbolic *mise en scène* have never ceased to fascinate me. Today its maverick existence happily obviates some tired questions, while raising other, perhaps more relevant ones. Since it is Laughton's sole directorial credit we can forget any obligation to consider it part and parcel of a grander auteurist design. With no other films to go on it is difficult to know how much of *Hunter* is Laughton: this obliges us to look to the part his collaborators played. Every indication is that their role was considerable, since we know these collaborators rarely, if ever, equalled the work they did on it. Here is the (abbreviated) roll-call: James Agee, Laughton, Davis Grubb (script); Stanley Cortez (cinematography); Walter Schumann (music); Hilyard Brown (art direction); Robert Mitchum, Shelley Winters, Lillian Gish (cast).

The parameters of Hollywood production and consumption are illuminated by the lack of success *Night of the Hunter* met with on its release in 1955. The fight Hollywood had on its hands to recapture hearts and minds lost to television took two forms. First, the industry looked to technological innovation to dramatise the smallness of the TV screen: Cinerama and 3-D in 1952, CinemaScope in 1953. Secondly, and more pertinently, the now humbled Hollywood studios turned towards independent production companies to revitalise the sclerotic formulae of popular cinema. *Night of the Hunter*, shot in black and white on 1.33 ratio film, came in through the back door in this way. It was produced independently by Paul Gregory, Laughton's manager and promoter since 1950, and released through United Artists. But although other independently produced features found favour, like Delbert Mann's *Marty* (1954), a TV spin-off also released through U.A., Laughton's film proved too perverse in tone and style for its time (a nation still feeling its way out of the nightmare of McCarthyism and the Korean War towards what was to be a post-war boom with its attendant liberalisation).

Given this context of social disorientation and paranoia brought on by an excess of demented authoritarianism, we can see that *Hunter* is a quintessential fairy story for its time. Today it is the film's critique of sexual domination, its deceptive Manicheism and its visual boldness that invites a more positive response. *Night of the Hunter* stands proud of mainstream cinema of the 50s, yet it is close enough to its time for us not to have to make a meal of the way the bits are put together. That is to say in terms of montage it breaks little or no new ground. Dissolves usually bracket and link chronological syntagma which are themselves made up of more or less brisk 'classical' cutting. It is the *mise en scène* that is radical. The emotional shocks suffered by a nine-year-old boy as he confusedly flees from a sadistic father figure through a blighted material and moral landscape are paralleled by the way aesthetics are quoted, collide and coexist.

This is the story we are told. It's the 1930s and Depression has hit the Ohio countryside



On the river: 'That's daddy!' says Pearl, but John is not convinced and wants to be off

hard. Ben Harper (Peter Graves), a disgruntled hardware store assistant, robs a bank, killing two men. Before being captured by the State Troopers he makes his children, John (Billy Chapin) and Pearl (Sally Jane Bruce), swear never to tell where he has hidden the \$10,000 loot—inside Pearl's doll, Miss Jenny. While in prison awaiting execution, Ben is interrogated by his cellmate Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum), a psychopathic preacher who, even though he has murdered a dozen women, is doing time for car-theft. But Ben takes his secret to the grave. After being released Powell makes his way to Harper's village, Cresap's Landing, where he loses no time ingratiating himself with Ben's widow, Willa (Shelley Winters), little Pearl and Willa's employers, Icye (Evelyn Varden) and Walt Spoon (Don Beddoe), who run an ice-cream parlour. Shortly afterwards the Preacher, having lied to Willa and John that he knows the money to be at the bottom of the Ohio River, informs the boy that he is to become his stepfather. On their honeymoon night Powell humiliates his bride and refuses to consummate the marriage, with the result that Willa turns into a religious fanatic.

Installed in the Harper household, the Preacher steps up his attempts to wheedle out the children's secret. Willa, convinced until now that John's complaints about Powell's cruel interrogations are untrue, overhears her husband torturing Pearl with his questions. The truth is out. Powell is obliged to silence his wife, dump her corpse in the river and fabricate a lie about Willa having deserted him for the benefit of the nosy Spoons. At a critical moment in their battle of wits, John elects to show Powell the hiding-place. They go down into the cellar, where Powell discovers the boy is lying. To save her brother from the ogre's rage, Pearl spills out the secret of Miss Jenny. In the mayhem that ensues the children manage to escape from the dark cellar. Pursued by the enraged Preacher, they look to John's old friend, the retired boatman Uncle Birdie (James

Gleason). But Birdie, in a state of drunken shock after discovering Willa's body in the river, cannot help them. The children just manage to gain the safety of the fast-moving river and Ben's skiff. As John, Pearl and Miss Jenny drift down river night after night, foraging and begging for food by day, Powell is in dogged pursuit.

Eventually the exhausted, starving pair are taken in by a kindly and strong-willed old woman, Rachel Cooper (Lillian Gish), who surrounds herself with a flock of unwanted children. For a time John and Pearl find happiness. But Powell is never far away and an encounter with Ruby (Gloria Castillo), Miss Cooper's eldest ward, alerts him to the children's whereabouts. He pays a visit to the old woman's farm. Miss Cooper, who senses that all is not well between Powell and John, sends him packing. That night the Preacher returns to claim the doll. A war of nerves in the darkened farmhouse ends with Rachel Cooper shooting Powell, who retreats squawking like a hurt chicken to her barn. Next morning the State Troopers come to take the wounded man away. In a hallucinatory moment John relives the traumatic events of Ben's capture by the police. At Powell's subsequent trial for murder the boy refuses to identify him. In court, the spectators are whipped up into a frenzy by the braying of the demented Spoons. To escape being lynched, Powell is driven out of town under armed guard. The story ends on Christmas Day. Pearl and an unburdened, happy John exchange presents with their pious and sentimental fairy godmother, Miss Cooper. John's new watch symbolises the return of 'normal' time.

The screenplay of *The Night of the Hunter* was drawn almost verbatim from a first novel of the same name by Davis Grubb, published in New York in 1953. Grubb was born and grew up by the Ohio River, on which his grandfather had been a riverboat captain. At the time of the Wall Street Crash and the onset of the Depression he was John Harper's

age. These social calamities coincided with a never to be forgotten 400-mile trip down the Ohio River aboard the *Queen City* taken by the young Grubb and his mother. 'Today,' Grubb wrote in a letter to Laughton, 'I spent the greater part of the morning on the trail of a sound which it seems to me is absolutely essential to the success of the river mood in this film. I heard it throughout the writing of this book—listened to it in the shadows of memory, heard it as I have heard it through the dreams of my childhood and in years since then: the blowing of the whistle of the steamboat, *Queen City*.' Grubb is a devout populist whose kinship with past and present people is expressed as languid phantasmagoria tinged with pantheism. His novel is written in the breathless, colloquial style of Sherwood Anderson, another Ohio-born writer, though in ambience it is most indebted to Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Both books share a bottomlands setting, with the river as redemptive highway along which a child flees from a rapacious father bent on discovering the secret of hidden money. The landscape the river bisects is blasted by social disintegration, by religious hysteria and outrageous villainy.

Thanks to Charles Higham's recent biography of Charles Laughton, we now know for certain that the final script owes little to James Agee, which is obvious really if you put the script and novel side by side. Agee's name was suggested to Laughton by their distributors, United Artists, who had recently tasted success with the writer's work on Huston's *The African Queen*. Laughton and Agee began developing the screenplay at the actor's Hollywood home, where Agee shut himself away for weeks, working many hours a day in the sweltering heat, then drinking excessively every night, much to Laughton's disapproval. When, towards the end of the summer of '54, the writer delivered a huge telephone directory of a script, Laughton was mortified to find that many of Grubb's most poetic passages had been replaced with reams of background detail emphasising the Depression setting, with scenes of the WPA, bread-lines, soup-kitchens and the Wobblies. Agee went, and Laughton set to editing the script in readiness for shooting that September.

Since the beginning of the year he had been in contact with Davis Grubb, constantly seeking advice, getting long letters back, written as the novel had been in mellifluous, almost unpunctuated prose. Fortunately one of these letters has been preserved in *The Night of the Hunter* Study Collection, donated to the Library of Congress by Elsa Lanchester, Laughton's widow. From it one can see that Grubb's collaboration was of paramount importance for the film, especially where visual style was concerned, because the novelist enthusiastically bombarded Laughton with sketches, story-boards and documentation. At the end of the day James Agee, who died in May 1955 before seeing the completed film, was embarrassed at getting full script credit, which he felt should go to Laughton and Grubb. He saw his role as a sort of combination sounding-board and counterirritant'. But Paul Gregory insisted: Agee's name looked good on the marquee—they'd parted with \$30,000 for that privilege—and Laughton seemed eager to emphasise the team effort over and above his own contribution. The credits read 'From the

Freud, whose ideas, or rather a bowdlerised version of them, had penetrated shallowly into the popular American consciousness after 1945, coined the term 'family romance' to describe the fantasies children and neurotics have in which the subject invents a new family for him- or herself. These paranoiac delusions are founded on the sexual rivalry felt between the child and his father and mother. Gripped by oedipal fear, the child feels slighted and so imagines a more ideal family for himself: he may think he wasn't born of his actual parents, but of noble ones; or that his father was noble and his mother promiscuous; or that while he is legitimate his siblings are not, and so on.

An abiding absorption with the family romance is demonstrated by our unselfconscious interest in narrative of all kinds. In Grubb's novel the act of story-telling provides a running commentary on events. The same is true of the film. John's first story, told to Pearl, and bisected by the looming shadow of Harry Powell on the bedroom wall, concerns a rich king in Africa who is abducted by bad men. Before going he instructs his son to protect his gold. Later, in Miss Cooper's kitchen, the old lady begins the story of Moses. John, to whom the Bible signifies the evil Preacher, moves away but is eventually caught up in the story of the Egyptian princess finding a 'boy king' in a skiff washed up on a bar. (Rachel Cooper reveals her own family romance here: she is a Pharaoh's daughter.) And finally, as Powell lays siege to the Cooper homestead, she proceeds to tell her assembled brood about Herod's vendetta against the infant Jesus.

As the stories within the story pile up they become more and more conventional and familiar, known truths handed down by a pious old woman, no longer invented by an obsessional, frightened child who cannot see himself as a character in them. John's dawning awareness that he is characterised in Rachel's stories, that he can be part of a fabled but known moral universe rather than a dislocated phantasmagoric one, heralds his impending liberation from the family romance, from the nightmare of Harry Powell.

The imaginary became real: no wonder John Harper was disoriented! Whatever oedipal fantasies he may have entertained about his parents are revived when Ben disappears ignominiously and his double, the sadistic Powell, takes his place in Willa's affections. A new family romance is actualised, one balanced on a real knife's edge. To see your mother as a man's wife, Brecht said, you need to destroy certain illusions, to defamiliarise subjective ties. This happens, for instance, when you acquire a stepfather. Powell's arrival alters Willa so much that she becomes a ghost of her former self, a pale, frigid obsessive whom John barely recognises as his mother. Although John first encounters Powell as a nocturnal shadow on the wall, this intruder is most emphatically a father figure. Announced metaphorically as a black steam engine hurtling through the night towards sleepy Cresap's Landing, Powell comes armed with fearsome phallic power in the shape of a flick-knife that has already ended the lives of a dozen women: 'I come not with Peace but with a Sword'.

We first see this tumescent symbol in a



'These fingers, dear hearts, is always a warrin' and a tuggin' one agin t'other'

strip-joint. Powell/Mitchum is in the audience, staring aggressively at a stripper going through the motions. (A brilliant shot this, in which a spotlight on the dancer creates a keyhole effect that sums up Powell's voyeurism.) A series of inserts shows us the letters 'H-A-T-E' tattooed on the clenched knuckles of his left hand. Before we can read what is tattooed on the right it slides into his pocket and, as the lascivious rhythms of the band swell to a climax, the blade of the knife slashes through the cloth of his jacket. John must live out the actual threat of castration because on the face of it he won't divulge where the money is hid. When Ben gives the 'cursed, bloodied gold' to his son there is a burden of guilt, for the crime of murder, that goes with it. John's dilemma is that there is nobody on whom he can divest this 'sin of the father', least of all Powell, a multi-murderer incapable of guilt feelings. The only way to get rid of the unwanted responsibility is for John to give it back to Ben. And when, at the cathartic *déjà vu* of Powell's arrest, Ben is substituted for the hated Preacher, John is able to do just this: 'Here! Take it back, Dad!' he bleats, beating his prone father with the doll, 'It's too much! Here! Here!'

Guilt in the form of gilt is hidden in the doll, a symbol of the mother's desired body. This guilt is Christian guilt, a powerful

cocktail of original sin mixed with parricidal anxiety. What unites Powell to John, making the child the father of the man, is that they are both trying to solve an oedipal riddle. In passing on the knowledge that the secret resides in the possession of the mother's cursed body, Ben hands on the baton of patriarchy to his son, but Powell, armed with his 'Sword of Jehovah', intervenes to usurp the boy's position, and then cause his mother to disappear altogether. Powell's fatal attraction to widows—'Well, now, what's it to be, Lord, another widow?'—is an indication of his own oedipal compulsion. He can take the place of the father in the mother's affections because his matronly victims have outlived their spouses and the father is already absent. All is plain sailing: Powell has easy access to the desired mother's 'little wad of bills hidden away in the sugar-bowl', the gilt hidden in the woman's body.

After all responsibility is lifted from John's shoulders, the boy is indifferent to Powell's fate. The camera stays in close on John's face as a lawyer asks him to identify Powell, who we are never to see again except once in long shot. The fantastic intrudes once more: we sense that perhaps it is Ben sitting in the dock and we blanch at the idea of the guilty man's eyes boring into the boy. Released from his ordeal, his innocence restored, John takes his place in the normal world, ironically alongside a widow, as saintly a double for Willa as Powell was evil for Ben. Indifferent now to oedipal yearning, John, one can comfortably predict, will in such anodyne, pious company become a Walt Spoon.

The Night of the Hunter depicts the alienated relation of the sexes and the break-up of the family under capitalism, symbolised by the disoriented bands of unwanted children wandering through the Depression-hit countryside in search of food. Although the river and Old Mother Goose seem to offer an avenue of escape, the bleakness is unremitting, every couple's relationship is open to question. Sexual repression in God's name has taken its toll. The hysterical

Robert Mitchum, Billy Chapin: Powell and John strive to solve an oedipal riddle



masochism inculcated by patriarchy blossoms in such times of economic disintegration into the sadism of a Harry Powell (and a John Harper?) and the sadism of the fascist lynch mob. The ironical invocation of Old Testament wisdom—'I come not with Peace but with a Sword'—reminds us that Hegel characterised Abraham as the prototype alienated man. And Christianity, he wrote, is a symptom, a symbolisation of social and political malaise; as such it can never provide a solution to these. John is never to break through this vicious circle, even when safe in Rachel Cooper's cosy nest. This is the sting in the tale.

Intellectual and nonconformist, aesthete and ham obsessed by the 'big part', Charles Laughton is depicted by Charles Higham as a highly moral man, Jesuit by education, gripped by a feeling of guilt and disgust at his own homosexuality and physical ugliness, a man who used his skill as an actor to invite compassion and understanding for his monstrous *alter egos*, Quasimodo, Henry VIII, Bligh, Nero, Barrett. Harry Powell is first cousin to these sympathetic ogres. A quick look at Laughton's career in the theatre immediately prior to *Hunter* is instructive, particularly with reference to his work with Brecht and his adaptations of Shaw, Bénet and Wouk.

Laughton met the exiled Brecht at the Hollywood home of screenwriter Salka Viertel, and before long they were collaborating on a translation of Brecht's *Galileo* (1937-9). This labour began in 1943 and progressed at a leisurely pace until 1947. The actor knew no German and the playwright spoke little English. Brecht would describe the gist of the dialogue in broken English and Laughton would act it out in a variety of ways until it seemed right. 'We were compelled,' Brecht wrote, 'to do what better equipped translators should do too: translate the underlying attitudes.' Joseph Losey, who

was to mount the play, and who had known Laughton since 1931, was sometimes present at these sessions. The net result of this collaboration was that a second version of the play emerged. Galileo changed from a man of the people heroically defending his ideas against the forces of obscurantism to a more contradictory individualist capable of both opportunism and cowardice.

Galileo opened at the tiny Coronet Theatre in Hollywood on July 30th 1947 in the Losey/Brecht production with Laughton in the title role. The stage was kept bare except for wooden platforms and beams, with the curtain and backdrops based on Renaissance engravings and drawings. A gauze curtain drawn by a tiny pageboy indicated the passage of the scenes. *Galileo* ran for a month at the Coronet, but before it could open at the Maxine Elliott Theatre in New York in December, Brecht had been hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The day after his appearance he was hot-footing it to Switzerland.

Laughton's subsequent work in the theatre is informed by his collaboration with Brecht. In *Don Juan in Hell* (1951), his adaptation of a scene from Shaw's *Man and Superman*, Laughton dressed his quartet of actors in evening clothes (rather than the *commedia dell'arte* costumes laid down by Shaw), and sat them on stools on a bare stage with their lines on a lectern in front of them. In his adaptation of Stephen Vincent Bénet's Civil War verse drama, *John Brown's Body* (1952), the three actors again sport evening dress and drift in and out of their and their colleagues' parts as they amble around and sometimes wander off the sparsely furnished stage (an actor's bar and a few chairs). There was no attempt at psychologising or mimesis (two Brechtian *bêtes noires*): the audience was watching a sort of Bayeux Tapestry unfold and couldn't be blind to its historical bias. (Although Laughton popularised Brecht's aesthetic ideas he did not share his political

attitudes. The actor's politics are hard to define, but if anything he comes across as a democrat fond of quoting Lincoln, an English émigré who appreciated the American Way of Life, a liberal for whom God was just another playwright. There was a little of the Galileo in Laughton: here too was a man who learnt to keep a low profile during an era of reaction while secretly hatching out his *magnum opus*.)

It is difficult to gauge how much Brechtian theory found its way into *Hunter* since the fantastic, that other interrogation of the social and semantic order, is also at work in the film. The defamiliarisation of the everyday is common to both, but whereas the fantastic, which is centred on psycho-sexual relations, disorients the spectator by exploiting his empathy, Brechtian *Verfremdung*, centred on socio-economic relations, achieves disorientation by distancing the spectator from the spectacle. *Night of the Hunter* is so richly textured a film because it synthesises both approaches. Antithesis, then, is at the very heart of this tale in which good battles evil, light overcomes dark, child takes on adult. Empathy stands opposed to distanciation; 'Griffithian Pastoral' to 'German Expressionism'; elegy to irony. Or rather, the two strains overlap in a rather complex way.

Like all Hollywood film, *Hunter* relies on our empathy. The camera sets us alongside John and Pearl. Occasionally our identification with John is emphasised by a shot from his point of view, as when at the picnic where Powell courts Willa John has his tie roughly straightened by his stepfather-to-be. His fingers busy out of frame, Mitchum's smirking face appears in close-up, bottom right, while on the hill behind him, already in his power so to speak, we see Pearl and her doll and Willa running towards Icay, who waits, arms outstretched, to congratulate the young woman on her choice of suitor. While an off-screen John is excluded, Mitchum is integrated into this gullible harem by Cortez' deep-focus photography. Yet he is simultaneously alienated from it: light reflected from the river at his feet plays over his face and lends it a livid appearance that contradicts the arcadian feeling of sunshine bathing the landscape at his back.

If *Hunter* depends on empathy, it also relies on distanciation. We are struck by the contrasting aesthetics at work; we aren't sure which basket to put our eggs in. There are basically three aesthetics in use: 'Griffithian Pastoral' and 'German Expressionism', supplemented by contemporary Hollywood film practice. Like Brecht, Laughton was an eclectic artist who thought the conflict of styles within a work lent it textural richness and dialectical integrity. At the same time the spectator was made aware of the conventional nature of what he saw, he was encouraged to be critical about its ideological bias. In this sense *Night of the Hunter* is a very open work.

Political and economic crises encourage an uncomplicated (and pointless) nostalgia for lost innocence, for the good old days. *Hunter*, made during one crisis (McCarthyism), about another (the Depression), gives an airing to old-fashioned virtues and values. Alongside this ethical consensus we must set an implicit nostalgia for the dear dead days of silent cinema. Before embarking on his first film Laughton studied all D. W. Griffith's. This

Shelley Winters, Robert Mitchum: slivers of light and a knife blade



provided him with a refresher course in film-making technique. But Laughton and his team also wanted to recreate the arcadian qualities Griffith's use of landscape had, with its emphasis on natural light and deep space. The sequence when the paddle steamer passes Cresap's Landing has just this impressionistic feeling. The presence of Lillian Gish refers us back to Griffith. And Cortez rehabilitates archaic devices like the iris. There is a shot of Mitchum leaning against a tree in the Harper garden. He is intensifying his terror campaign and calls out seductively for the children. As he moves towards the house, the camera irises down to a detail until then unnoticed: John and Pearl's grimy faces pressed fearfully against the cellar window.

Laughton once owned a production company with Erich Pommer, who helped make *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. But the 'German Expressionism' of *Hunter* is never specific and could just as readily have come via the Universal horror film (Laughton had acted with James Whale on the English stage; Whale's *The Old Dark House*, 1932, was Laughton's first Hollywood film), or from Welles (Cortez was cinematographer on *The Magnificent Ambersons*). High contrast expressionist lighting expresses mood (*Stimmung*) by abstracting an already schematised reality. While it affirms the physicality of objects—they cast shadows—it also makes them look unreal by turning them into flattened out signs, into mental representations.

Of course this transposition happens in all verbal and visual language, but what is specific about expressionism is that contour becomes fluid, the known is liable to be lost in a pool of darkness (with a disorienting effect on the viewer), reality is subjectivised, latent content is revealed. In a scene like the martyrdom of Willa in the attic bedroom, the geometrical slivers of shadow signify Powell's splintered psyche. The lighting, the melancholy waltz on the soundtrack and Mitchum's mannered acting all serve to distance us from Willa's demise so that we too become unfeeling ogres. Expressionism in painting emphasises the picture plane. Cinematic expressionism emphasises the screen itself, and can be a form of self-reference. Powell's first appearance at Cresap's Landing emphasises the inherently fantastic nature of cinema itself. The man's shadow projected by the lamp outside John's house looms on the screen of the boy's bedroom wall. We, the spectators, the shot implies, are gripped by the cinematic spectacle as fatefully as John is by the monster's shadow, we are just as firmly in Plato's cave. (A conceit this: the lamp is higher than Mitchum, it couldn't throw his shadow upwards.)

Powell's disappearance, and John's and our deliverance from cinema/the fantastic, is predicted in just as striking a way. Rachel Cooper and Powell are engaged in their climactic battle of wits, she in her rocking chair in her kitchen, he seated on the fence in her yard. Between them is the (unseen) gauze screen of her window. When Ruby enters, the light from her candle illuminates the screen brightly, blotting out Powell. By the time the flame is extinguished he has vanished, and the fight is really on.

Since these aesthetics are historically determined and used self-consciously as

referent systems, they can never be 'pure'. They are mediated, bolstered, by contemporary Hollywood practice. 'Griffith' is enhanced by second-unit location shooting from a helicopter, by back projection, by Walter Schumann's at times lush, 'optimistic' score; and the shallow, flattened expressionism of Willa's attic is supplemented by the deep space of the large sound stage, by the disorienting play of scale, depth and substance which those controlled conditions permitted.

Night of the Hunter is suffused with enough irony at every level for us to assume that it may be interpreted wholly under this sign. The nostalgic candour of Rachel Cooper, linked as it is to John's silence, to our empathy with him, and to pastoral innocence, stands in ironic contrast to this irony. Although it is she who frames the narrative—she opens and closes the film with repeated homilies about the fortitude of children—we know her to be biased. This Brechtian device means that we can place her story as but one in a long list of songs, fables and aphorisms spoken by characters in the film. There is no reason to suppose that it has more objective truth than those.

Irony, tinged agreeably with black humour, saturates the dialogue. Everything Powell says is ironical, since we know for certain that he never speaks the truth. If it can be said to have a model, Mitchum's Powell seems closest to the more libidinous, sadistic characters of Disney or Tex Avery. The scene in the cellar where he learns the secret of the doll is built on the slapstick dramatics of *Tom and Jerry*. At one point in the script he is referred to as the Big Bad Wolf, at others he is metaphorically likened to a gar or a predatory owl. We hear him growl and howl and squawk. Then there is dramatic irony, for example, in the fact that in encouraging Willa to capture Powell's affection Icye guarantees her death.

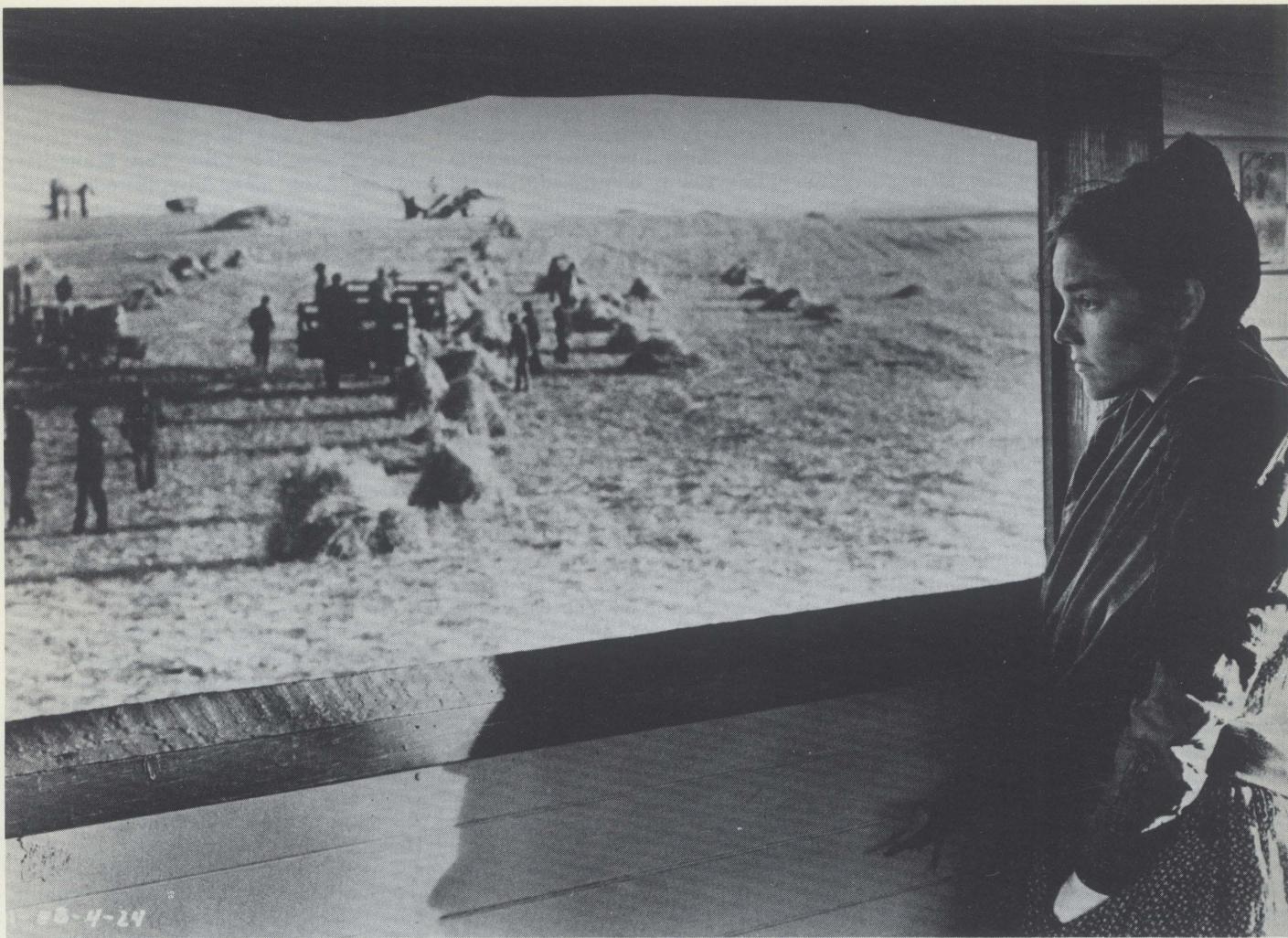
The use of visual hyperbole is another form of irony: when Powell courts Willa at the

picnic the script calls for 'drooling willows, almost in travesty of a romantic scene'. And irony is built into the way sound and image are co-ordinated either in the shot or in the cut: Icye's advice to Willa to remarry is interrupted twice by inserts of the express bringing Powell to town, while Schumann's blaring 'doom' music drives the point home; later, as a soothing female voice sings, 'Rest, little ones, rest; rest here on my breast', a low-angled camera keeps the fatigued youngsters in shot as it tracks past the legs and *udders* of cows stalled in a welcoming barn. Repetition leads to irony. The shot of Powell in court is mimicked exactly by a later shot of Harper in court, down to the clerk staring at the judge above and behind him. (Repetition is also used non-ironically to give symmetry and rhythm to the narrative.) On one occasion film form itself is brought into play. As Powell leans over the prone Willa, the passage of his knife across her throat is symbolised by a vertical wipe to her cherubic children asleep next door. Willa's nightmare has ended; theirs is just beginning.

Two or three times the number of words contracted for would not be enough to do justice to the film. The interested reader can plug some of the above gaps by consulting the following. The screenplay appears in *Agee on Film*, volume 2, (New York, n.d.); however, it differs from the film in many details. Davis Grubb's novel has recently (1977) been republished by Penguin. Read both Charles Higham's *Charles Laughton* (London, 1976) and Kurt Singer's *The Laughton Story* (Philadelphia, 1954) for an object lesson in how times and attitudes change. Stanley Cortez refers in detail to the improvised shooting of certain key scenes in Charles Higham's *Hollywood Cameramen* (London, 1970). Of foreign language material, Gérard Lenne pens some eloquent pages in *Le Cinéma 'fantastique' et ses mythologies* (Paris, 1970); ditto Jacques Goimard in *L'Avant-Scène du cinéma*, no. 202, 1978.

Gilt revealed, guilt assuaged: the cathartic déjâ vu of Powell's arrest





'Days of Heaven': Brooke Adams

THE EYES OF TEXAS

Richard Combs

Terrence Malick's 'Days of Heaven'

To the extent that a director's second film often proves a greater stumbling block than his first (especially if the latter has been any kind of critical or commercial success), then *Days of Heaven* must be accounted a particularly audacious gamble. It is now some six years since Terrence Malick made *Badlands*, one of the most remarkable directorial debuts in American cinema, loosely based on the real-life killing spree of two teenagers across the Dakota badlands in the late 50s, but turned by Malick into a complex reappraisal of the social and mythical terms of the cinema's many romantic odysseys since then. In *Days of Heaven*, only his second film, he has risked the charge

of repetition by reshuffling many of the elements of *Badlands*: hapless youngsters on the run; a picaresque narrative wrapped in a blandly distanced commentary; an 'ecstatic' flow of imagery which begs our sense of wonder. Even more dangerously, he has increased the distance between the levels of enchantment and the levels of meaning. Visually, *Days of Heaven* seems to have set out to be more seductive than *Badlands*, while in terms of theme, character and even plot, it is more diffuse, dispersed and secretive.

In a collage of highly coloured and almost wordless scenes, Malick (and cameramen Nestor Almendros and Haskell Wexler) have conjured, pointillist-fashion, a beguiling landscape, both harsh and magical: the huge wheat-growing area of the Texas Panhandle, to which, in 1916, a pair of young lovers, Abby (Brooke Adams) and Bill (Richard Gere), and the latter's young sister Linda (Linda Manz), are driven from the urban squalor of the North. But Malick is as dramatically spare as he is visually ornate. *Days of Heaven* develops as a relatively simple tale of triangular passions—Abby becomes involved with a wealthy young farmer (playwright Sam Shepard), in an initially mercenary scheme which turns into a romantic complication. But the human content of the story seems to be buried somewhere beneath its telling, while its manifestations (the wheat harvest, a flying circus, a locust plague, a fire) are spectacularly more than satisfying.

Despite teasing hints that what we are

watching might be a Greek tragedy, an allegory of primal passion, or a Tom Sawyerish adventure, Malick remains insistent that the inner life of his people is unknowable, that they will only be partially understood in any of these modes. Somewhere in the gap between character and action, in the silence that surrounds motive and feeling, Malick finds the tension that drives and 'explains' his characters. In describing the relation between the off-screen commentator of *Badlands* and what we see of herself and her teen lover on screen, he has commented on '... Holly's mis-estimation of her audience, of what they will be interested in or ready to believe ... When they're crossing the badlands, instead of telling us what's going on between Kit and herself ... she describes what they ate and what it tasted like, as though we might be planning a similar trip ...' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1975).

Such a lack functions ironically in *Badlands*, but similar absences—or rather silences, such as Malick imposes at crucial dramatic points—work more mysteriously in *Days of Heaven*. The narration here is even more tangential to what one might take as the main events, and the fact that it is provided not by one of the central lovers but by a child emphasises that we are to be allowed little privileged information. What Malick has done, however, is much more radical than supplying a child's-eye-view of some strange adult drama. His film is split between the much that we see and the little that we know, and what we share is not so much the perspective of Linda, our informant, as her piecemeal acquisition of knowledge and experience.

Malick's narrative method, in fact, has more to do with this selective accretion of detail than with telling a story or developing a set of characters. It is a method which has a peculiarly literary flavour, not surprising perhaps given his invocation of *What Maisie Knew* as a model for Linda's commentary, but certainly a unique way of containing the visual superabundance of the film. In another sense, Malick may not be so far from the cinema: the significant 'silences' of *Days of Heaven* suggest a relation, in terms of subject and structure, to the movies of (roughly) its own era as strong as the interplay of 50s teen-movie mythology in *Badlands*.* In making what he has referred to as almost a silent film, Malick has found an apt context for his own dramatic processes and a strikingly original way of incorporating his sense of cinema—although in the category of more conventional *homage*, one must include a lonely Victorian farmhouse out of *Giant*, stranded in the midst of the Texas plain.

The gamble Malick has taken is that audiences will be safely transported over the silences and lacunae by the fairy-tale atmosphere—which, to judge by the reviews that have willingly succumbed to the visual enchantment, seems to have paid off. That the film also sets up other obstacles to audience involvement can be seen from even a cursory comparison with *Badlands*. Where the latter started from a powerful dramatic situation, and then took off into eccentric digressions, *Days of Heaven* begins with the

digressions, and only after a while bothers to bind them into a kind of story. The opening scene, in fact, is the first instance of the quasi-silent, 'suppressed' narrative. In a Chicago steel foundry, Bill has an argument with the foreman, unheard above the roar of the furnaces, then knocks him down and flees. He leaves the city with Abby and Linda, sharing precarious passage atop some boxcars with other migrant labourers, to work for the summer on a Texas wheat farm. The next complication is audible but somewhat inexplicable: Linda tells how, presumably for reasons of propriety, Bill and Abby pretended to be brother and sister.

From the inexplicable, the plot proceeds to connections that are ineffable. During the summer that the three spend toiling in the fields around that incongruous Gothic citadel, Abby attracts the attention of the young proprietor of the farm. The source of the attraction, as Linda muses, was hard to determine: 'Maybe it was the way the wind blew through her hair.' But Bill, vaguely ambitious and increasingly discontented with the state of grinding poverty, encourages Abby to lead the farmer on, after he learns by accident that the latter is ill and not expected to live beyond a year. Abby and the farmer are married; Bill and Linda stay on after the other labourers have left, and move into the big house. Thus begins, for Linda at least, the days of heaven: 'We were all living like kings, just nothing to do all day but lie around cracking jokes ... I'm telling you, the rich got it all figured out.' But Abby begins to fall in love with her husband, while his awed announcement—'You've made me come back to life'—turns out to be literally true, as a year passes and the frustrated Bill finds himself no nearer his goal of appropriation. The farmer, in turn, begins to suspect, to his horror, that the supposed brother and sister are romantically involved.

'Just when things were about to blow,' in Linda's phrase, Malick drops in an outrageous *deus ex machina*, a troupe of flying clowns, who proceed to entertain the household with all manner of theatrical skits—including a Charlie Chaplin film sequence. At the height of the revels, Malick stages a climactic revelation in explicit re-creation of silent cinema: captured in silhouette behind the billowing drapery of a gazebo, Bill and Abby are seen kissing by the farmer. Bill later leaves with the fliers, but returns—out of regret, remorse, a desire to see Abby once more or a last hope of retrieving her—with the next influx of harvest workers. The farmer sees them together and believes his worst fears confirmed—ironically, at the moment when he is least in danger of losing Abby.

The sequence of events that follows seems to spring from passions way beyond the laconic spectrum of the film's characters, and from an artistic design paradoxically greater than the contours of its plot. First a plague of locusts descends—a sequence which Malick builds, with quiet ferocity, to proper biblical proportions—until a fire, accidentally started, sweeps across the wheat fields, destroying crop and parasite alike. In the aftermath, Bill is confronted by the farmer, whom he kills in self-defence. He, Abby and Linda then flee once more, enjoying a brief idyll as they travel downriver until the film, rather surprisingly but quite consistently, allows them to dwindle away to their separate ends.

Consistently, that is, because if anything explains the spaciousness and inconclusiveness of Malick's plotting it is his desire to have several narratives coexist. By comparison with the tight-fitting irony with which Holly's voice-over relates to the action of *Badlands*, *Days of Heaven* seems to be made up of a number of discrete worlds, with its narrator simply one small voice who scarcely impinges on the adults around her. But as in the earlier film, the function of her comments is to measure distance: her matter-of-factness prevents audiences from identifying too readily with the characters; her sense of wonder prevents the latter from being swept away too easily by events. Her third voice, that of an interpreter—as when she describes Abby's feelings during their flight from the farm: 'She blamed it on herself. She didn't care if she was happy or not. She just wanted to make up for what she had done'—testifies to things we know or see nothing of at all, and so emphasises the partiality, the incompleteness of the plot as such.

In other instances, Linda's awareness is itself clearly incomplete. Her expression of sympathy for the romantically doomed farmer—'I felt sorry for him, because he had nobody to stand up for him, to be by his side'—doesn't take into account the latter's close attachment to his grizzled foreman (Robert Wilke). It is this relationship, the most briefly indicated in the film, which finally impels events toward tragedy. Out of his fierce, fatherly protectiveness, the old man prompts the farmer's suspicions about what Abby and Bill are up to; after the farmer's death, it is his aggrieved foreman who whips up the posse that tracks the runaways.

But where *Badlands* preserved a narrative line, and some thematic continuities—the interplay of guilt and innocence in its recklessly self-deluded 'thrill' killers—through all its digressions and competing 'voices', *Days of Heaven* seems intent only on filling out its ever-expanding, coolly elegiac mood. The phenomena it collects and frames, with loving attention to the particularities of light and colour, seem to be related only in terms of the learning process delightedly invoked by Linda when she talks about her relationship with the farmer—'He taught me about parts of the globe'—or in terms of more mysterious and faintly foreboding associations (the huge tractors which work the farm recall the steel furnaces of the opening; the sparks that fly during a fireside celebration anticipate the devouring locusts).

That Malick manages to hold this eccentric, alchemical solution together is a testament to a sense of control and design that is clearly obeying its own laws even when it is defying those of conventional narrative. One suspects also that, in place of the local ironies of *Badlands*, he has arrived at a more overreaching perspective, as ambivalently compassionate and detached, in which the silences and absences of meaning in his characters' lives stand for all those things which are above and beneath their gaze. In one small scene, as Bill and Abby slip away from the farmhouse one night to lie together in the fields, the film moves with a strange grace from abstract contemplation of the cloudscapes and heavens above them to a brief shot in which we see a glass they have carelessly discarded sinking through water to come to rest amid the flora and fauna of the riverbed.

* See the article by Terry Curtis Fox in *Film Comment*, September–October 1978, in which he compares *Days of Heaven* to Murnau's *City Girl*.

'I like the idea of Sadism'

TELEVISION VIOLENCE AS A MORAL PANIC

Brian Winston

The problem of violence on television, like the problem of the poor, would appear to be always with us. The Independent Broadcasting Authority's working party on 'The Portrayal of Violence' last year celebrated its eighth birthday and produced its third interim report. The Authority 'set aside a full day to consider its implications,' writes Lady Plowden, the IBA chairman, in the current handbook. It is difficult to know whether or not a day was sufficient because it is as yet unpublished; but if the two previous reports are anything to go by there was probably time for a longish lunch.

The working party was established in 1970, following general meetings on the violence problem called by James Callaghan, the then Home Secretary, to examine the operation of the code on 'Violence in Television Programmes' required by the second Television Act of 1964. As a result, the ITV code was amended in 1971. It says, 'Ideally, a code should give a clear guide to behaviour based on reliable knowledge of the consequences of different decisions. Unfortunately, no code of this kind can be provided.' What are given instead, in under fifteen hundred words, are some thoughts on the matter followed by some, almost specific, instructions. The introduction states 'Conflict is of the essence of drama, and conflict often leads to violence.' 'The real world contains much violence in many forms and when television seeks to reflect the world—in fact or in fiction—it would be unrealistic and untrue to ignore its violent aspects.' The Code proper points out that the level of violence portrayed across the entire output, not just in any one programme, must be considered and that the Authority accepts the principle of a 'family viewing time' which makes the portrayal of violence less tolerable before

the watershed of 9 o'clock in the evening. While placing the responsibility squarely on the programme makers to use 'careful consideration' when depicting violence (whether realistic or 'sanitised', in costume or in domestic settings), it finally advises them 'If in doubt, cut.'

Thus the Code treads a careful but, according to many, ineffective path through the received knowledge on this matter. Basically it accepts the notion of greater vulnerability of the young and the possibility of imitative behaviour. But equally importantly it maintains the essential right of freedom of expression, makes nothing obligatory, avoids censorship and accepts violent television as a proper reflection of a violent world.

Two years after the publication of this document the working party which drew it up, and was charged with monitoring its effectiveness, recommended no changes to it. And two years after that, in 1975, the same group again recommended no revisions or amendments. That is not to say they did nothing in the 70s. The working party felt that all concerned in the planning, production and scheduling of ITV programmes should

be apprised of their views on the current research situation; that further publicity should be given to the family viewing policy; that Presentation should be more explicit in providing viewers with information about violence in programmes and that some form of electronic marker—a warning symbol on the screen—should be tested in one region. They cottoned on to the fact that violent post-9-o'clock programmes could be given violent pre-9-o'clock trailers and that, therefore, 'trailers shown before 9 o'clock should not be unsuitable for children'. They also suggested that if there was doubt about the application of the Code (which one might have thought meant, in terms of the 1971 document, simply 'cut') there should be (instead?) consultation upwards.

'If in doubt, cut.'

The BBC were also at the meetings with the Home Secretary which led to the revised ITV code. They too had a code of practice established (although without pressure of statute) in 1960; and they too rewrote this, following the meetings, in 1972. The code was expanded into 'A Note of Guidance'—which is no mean feat linguistically since the former is defined as 'a system of rules or regulations' and the latter as 'a brief memorandum of topics for a discourse'. In this 13-page Note many of the basic points in the ITV 1971 Code are repeated. The BBC argues that it has been necessary to pay regard to 'tradition, experience, a sense of responsibility, and a general public feeling that

physical violence is a bad thing.' But, 'Violence is part of nature and part of life' and must not, therefore, be disguised although, as Britain is a country with low levels of direct physical violence in its culture, it must not be suggested that physical violence can solve problems or that its portrayal be used to stir up unnecessary anxieties in the audience. Nevertheless 'It is a legitimate part of storytelling to chill the spine.'

So both Code and Note, despite minor differences, share worries about the young and about easily imitated violence but leave the rights of broadcasters essentially unfettered, insisting, however, 'The basic aim must be to sharpen and not to blunt the human sensitivities of the viewer.' (BBC Note.)

'I wish you would come up with a different device than running the man down with a car.'

When one compares these documents to the response of the broadcasting industry in the States one must be favourably impressed. Similar codes have been an absolute dead letter, and even a family viewing policy has been treated as a violation of First Amendment 'freedom of speech' rights by the networks. Broadcasters have sought brutally to silence all those who would try to lay any blame for the violence in American society at their door. When a senator in the 50s did no more than get quoted in *Reader's Digest* in an article entitled 'Let's Get Rid of Tele-Violence', an industry spokesman described the piece as 'vicious'. When a successor started to make headlines in the early 60s investigating the supposed relationship of television violence to juvenile delinquency, the new man was promptly corrupted by the networks. The most major investigation of the relationship between screen and actual violence thus far attempted by the American government was published as the 'Surgeon General's Report' in 1972 and all its investigators were secretly subject to television network approval!

All this was, of course, without effect on the output. After each assassination in the 60s the networks promised a clean-up. But nothing really changed. Following Robert Kennedy's assassination, for instance, there were still 71 murders and 254 violent incidents in 74 half-hour shows as opposed to 81 murders in 210 incidents the year before. The rate of violent incidents had dropped from 7.5 per hour to a mere 6.7 per hour.

And on no other topic do American producers seem as crass or uncaring. It was with relief that a writer on *Charlie's Angels* was told that the brief which required each heroine to be in jeopardy three times during each episode had been rethought by the producers. Each of the heroines need only be in jeopardy once—three jeopardies per hour, not nine as originally planned. Or take Quinn Martin, whose *Untouchables* put the poor relation network ABC for the first time at the top of the ratings game. Briefing a writer, he noted: 'I wish you would come up with a different device than running the man down with a car, as we have done this now in three different shows. I like the idea of sadism but I

hope that we can come up with another approach to it.'

'Violence on television appears to run in four or five year cycles... As violent types of programme gain popularity, their numbers increase until they become so directly competitive that their ratings are diluted until the audience tires, or until public and official criticism makes itself heard. Network machinery has worked to moderate the form of violence... until other factors (chiefly competition) begin to start a new cycle.' (Clark and Blankenburg.)

There is a chance that this process has been broken. For the last few years pressure groups in America have looked not at the programmes but at the sponsors. Naming 'the most violent advertisers in America' has brought a more thoroughgoing clean-up than any previous effort, so that there is arguably less mayhem (and more subteen 'tit and ass') on American screens than ever before. And in Britain, where the domestic rate of violent screen incidents was one-fifth that of American imports even in the great days of mayhem, it might be thought that the problem, if it ever existed, had now gone away. But the row goes on and on, notwithstanding.

The broadcasters themselves are partly responsible for this. There is a gap between the rhetoric of Code and Note and actual practice. For instance, twice the IBA working party has left the 'family viewing policy' intact; but BBC research in 1974 revealed that a quarter of a million children between 5 and 7 were watching the 9 o'clock play. 44 per cent of 5-to-7 year olds and 76 per cent of 8-to-11 year olds claimed to watch TV after the watershed. The IBA themselves could not confirm these high figures. But even they revealed in the same year that 5 per cent of 8-to-11 year olds and 8 per cent of 12-to-15 year olds were watching after nine. Yet ignoring their own nevertheless substantial figures, calling on parents to do their bit, and claiming the 9 o'clock watershed was no such thing but part of a progressive system slowly increasing the level of portrayed violence during the evening, they did nothing. Even allowing them the benefit of the doubt on the numbers of children watching, the progressive point cannot stand. The Annan Committee noted 9 o'clock occasionally resembles not 'a watershed' but 'a waterfall, after which the schedules plunge into gratuitously violent programmes.' The hour between 9 and 10 has 'on some days' become 'one of the most violent on British television.'

Let this prevarication on the effectiveness of Family Viewing Policy stand for a host of other fudged or postponed minor decisions (e.g. the electronic symbol, despite 'general approval', is to be subjected to more years of experiment which haven't yet begun). The main issue—does the violence in programmes match the requirements set out in Code and Note—also remains very open. The Annan Committee: 'The BBC were surprised when we enquired about the showing in 1975 of their play *Gangsters* because they have received relatively few complaints about it. But how can they reconcile their code of violence with a production which first showed a girl being tortured by electrodes which, it implied, are attached to her breasts, and worse—because better acted and shot—a seemingly endless slugging match between

'At times it is exceedingly hard to believe that producers have got the message.'

two men at the end of the film which continued for many minutes?' 'At times it is exceedingly hard to believe that producers have got the message.' But is it not naive to believe that producers are meant to get the message? Or rather is it not more proper to see the stress on freedom of expression in these official documents as their real thrust?

There is 'a situation in which society and the mass media continue to give verbal opposition to violence—to cry out against it—while at the same time television bombards its viewers with presentations of violent behaviour as a form of entertainment.' This is the view of William Belson, taken from his *Television, Violence and the Adolescent Boy** published in December 1978. But it is academic researchers like Belson and books like his latest more than the supposed hypocrisy of broadcasters that keeps the violence issue alive.

Belson stands heir to a research tradition which has been empirically proving, or authoritatively asserting, that television is not a scapegoat for the violence in society but an actual cause of it. *Television, Violence and the Adolescent Boy* is virtually unequivocal about this: 'The evidence gathered through this investigation is very strongly supportive of the hypothesis that high exposure to television violence increases the degree to which boys engage in serious violence. Thus for serious violence done by boys: (i) heavier viewers of television violence commit a great deal more serious violence than do lighter viewers of television violence who have been closely equated to the heavier viewers in terms of a wide array of empirically derived matching variables; (ii) the reversed form of this hypothesis is not supported by the evidence' (Belson's italics). He goes further to say that violence in sports programmes, excluding wrestling and boxing, violent cartoons, violence in science fiction programmes and in slapstick comedy will not have this effect, while violence in plays or films occurring in the context of close personal relationships, gratuitous violence, realistic violence in fiction, violence in fiction done 'in a good cause', and Westerns will.

So are not the broadcasters being disingenuous when they claim, as in the ITV Code, 'There are few relevant facts and few reliable findings derived from generally accepted research studies'?

The research is informed by either a psychology or sociology background and takes two largely distinct methodological approaches which correspond broadly to these parent disciplines. On the one hand sociologists, like Belson, tend to ask questions. The questionnaire lies at the root of the attempt to correlate screen and actual violence. (There are other sociological interests such as the analysis of what sort of violence is being portrayed and how violence, fiction and news, comes to be produced. Yet since all are agreed that television does deal in violence, these are of less immediate concern

* *Television, Violence and the Adolescent Boy*, by W. A. Belson (Saxon House, 1978).

here than the literature on media effects.) On the other hand, as reviewed in Eysenck and Nias' recent and provocative *Sex, Violence and the Media*,* the psychologist tends to create laboratory experiments in which exposure to media material is correlated with subsequent actual behaviour.

'The adult model began attacking the Bobo doll in ways that children rarely would... while saying things like "Sock him in the nose! Hit him down!"'

At the heart of the laboratory tradition stands an inflatable three-foot doll called Bobo who has a weighted rounded base. The classic laboratory experiments demonstrating that imitative behaviour can result from viewing (which are, therefore, enshrined in the Note and the Code on the dangers of the portrayal of easily imitated violence) concern a bunch of pre-school kids:

The first group observed real-life adults. An experimenter brought the children, one by one, into a test room. In one corner, the child found a set of play materials; in another corner, he saw an adult sitting quietly with a set of tinker toys, a large, inflated plastic Bobo doll and a mallet. Soon after the child started to play with his toys, the adult model began attacking the Bobo doll in ways that children rarely would. For example, the adult sat on the doll and punched it repeatedly in the nose, pummelled its head with the mallet, tossed it up in the air aggressively and kicked it around the room while saying things like "Sock him in the nose!" "Hit him down!" "Throw him in the air!" "Kick him!"

The second group of children saw a movie of the adult model beating up the Bobo doll. The third group watched a movie—projected through a television console—in which the adult attacking the doll was costumed as a cartoon cat. Children in the fourth group did not see any aggressive models; they served as a control group.

'At the end of ten minutes, the experimenter took each child to an observation room, where we recorded his behaviour. Each child spent 20 minutes in the room, and his behaviour was rated by psychologists observing through a one-way mirror. The results leave little doubt that exposure to violence heightens aggressive tendencies in children. Those who had seen the adult model attacking the Bobo doll showed approximately twice as much aggressiveness in the observation room as did those in the control group.' (Bandura.)

One does not need a PhD. to evaluate these fun and games in the Stanford University psychology labs. To invite children to a lab. to hit a toy designed to be hit is one thing. To extrapolate from this the possibility of antisocial behaviour against objects other than toys in circumstances other than the lab. requires a brave scientist. But this type of experiment in proving imitative behaviour or desensitisation or a whole range of other supposed media effects has been endlessly repeated with adults as well as children without any of the basic methodological objections being answered. For instance, forty-four 8-to-10 year olds, after watching

either a violent film or nothing, were then left observing two younger children. The watchers of the violent film were less likely than those who watched nothing to call for help when the younger ones started fighting. Thus watching television 'desensitises' people to actual violence.

I always feel when reviewing these experiments—and Eysenck and Nias provide a full résumé of them—that the experimenters had missed their calling and that all of them could have had a secure media career dreaming up stunts for 'Candid Camera'.

But there is one important point. Most of these experiments do show that exposure in laboratory conditions to violent images does provoke violent behaviour (leaving aside for the moment what is meant by 'violent' in both contexts). Eysenck and Nias, therefore, giving ground elegantly before the patent absurdity of most of the work they call in evidence, suggest: 'It does not follow that because research studies are not perfect, a conclusion of "no effect" can be drawn. It is possible to find fault with most studies in psychology and indeed in all science; this does not mean that a conclusion cannot be drawn even from the imperfect evidence, which is all that is usually available.' But this is really beside the point.

Eysenck and Nias, in arguing for a real relationship between portrayed and actual violence, have to deal with Howitt and Cumberbatch's *Mass Media Violence and Society*,† which reviews the same literature to reach the opposite conclusion. But Eysenck and Nias fail to take Howitt and Cumberbatch's main point on the experimental tradition. It is not that all the studies are flawed (and Howitt and Cumberbatch as social scientists themselves afford the researchers more academic courtesy than I for one would think they deserve). It is rather that 'the difficulty is enshrined in the difference between the question "could the mass media have this effect?" and the question "do the mass media have this effect?". Social scientists are highly skilled at developing experimental situations which are capable of answering the question "could" but answers to questions of the social reality involved in the "do" questions are much more difficult.' (Howitt and Cumberbatch's italics.)

So the case against the experimental tradition in the research is not that the experiments are flawed (although they are, fatally!) but that, even if they were perfection, they could leave us with only at best an open question. Since their methodologies are so authoritarian as to turn one's stomach, to ask the psychologists to continue to search for perfect laboratory confirmation of what cannot ever be more than a possibility, seems pointless.‡

Belson's style of research does not raise such

† *Mass Media Violence and Society*, by Dennis Howitt and Guy Cumberbatch (Elek Science, 1975).

‡ Given the nature of the experiments, one can validly ask if they are not ruled out of court by the extraordinary nature of the subject populations involved. For who would allow themselves or their children into the clutches of these scientists? Eysenck and Nias, for instance, report with something approaching relish an experiment in which young men are conditioned to get an erection on seeing photos of female footwear. For ethical reasons it was decided not to leave them with the new-found interest in female footwear, and so a procedure of 'extinction' was instituted... and the subjects were eventually declared officially 'cured'.

attendant moral issues. The first questionnaire studies on media effects, of which his is but the latest example, date back to the war. But few have been as categorical on the issue of violence as Belson. In *Television, Violence and the Adolescent Boy* there is a vast amount of effort put into the project and care taken to isolate variables (the big problem in the questionnaire method), yet he still does not, despite the sureness of his conclusions, actually come up with results much more conclusive than any of his predecessors. The answers still have to be taken on trust and definitions are still elusive.

What constitutes a violent programme? Belson used a team of thirty (paid) school-teachers to create scales of violence in programmes based on an extensive selection of 1970/71 output. These scales were then applied by 52 (paid) ex-members of the BBC Research Department's Television Panel, to grade 231 selected programmes culled from the period 1958/69. The subjects, the adolescent boys, were then asked to recall seeing the programmes and on the basis of their answers they were determined to be either 'serious' or 'light' watchers of TV violence.

'Thirty teachers felt *Match of the Day* was somewhere between *University Challenge* and *Steptoe and Son* in its violence level.'

All of which sounds, to the layman, thorough to the point of no return. Until one notes, for example, that the 30 teachers felt *Match of the Day* was somewhere between *University Challenge* and *Steptoe and Son* in its violence level; which goes to show that the total of thirty subjectivities is not an objective judgment. And further, as Murdock and McCron point out in a review of *Television, Violence and the Adolescent Boy*, the subjects were being asked to remember some shows transmitted when they were only a few years old.

Belson equally significantly fails to explore or cross-check what the boys tell him of the violence they claim to have committed in reality. He also allows a very wide range of activities to be classed as 'serious'. 'Violence' can mean different things to different people, and attitudes towards it are often class-based. But class or for that matter any other social parameter is deliberately excluded by Belson. What emerges is, then, a very middle-class view of 'serious' violence. And a very middle-class readiness to believe what street-wise subjects might choose to tell.

Murdock and McCron point out that the other factor ignored by Belson is that his group, the group which makes up the largest single element in Britain's criminal classes, is also a group which spends less time watching television than most others. Belson's reply could possibly be that they acquired violent propensities while watching when young which they now apply when teenage. But the fact remains that the common criminal is a 14-year-old boy and his common crime is vandalism, to which neither Starsky and Hutch nor Inspector Hackett nor anybody else devotes much screen time. So the violence on the screen has to be in some way stored (until the boy is old enough to start spending time on the street) and then transformed from

the norms of television mayhem into the norms of teenage criminal behaviour.

There is a sort of undistributed middle term here: Belson, it seems to me, is actually claiming that it is probable that some boys with good memories who watched some television programmes in which some activities were violent might, later, say they committed acts different from those watched which could also, if social context is utterly ignored, be considered (by some) violent. He certainly has not proved the hypothesis that high exposure to television violence increases the degree to which boys engage in serious violence. To cover his one aberrant result (for he cannot show any other irreversible hypothesis from the data) he invents a low-level psychological theory which he calls a 'disinhibition' process. He states this briefly, on practically the last page of the book, as 'a process through which inhibitions against being violent that are ordinarily built up in boys by parents and other socialising agencies are progressively broken down by the continuous presentation of violence on television, so that eventually *such violent urges as are present in boys* are rendered much more likely to "spill out", as it were, in the form of violent behaviour.' One can only follow Anthony Smith: 'This is a nice theory but Belson's previous 523 pages do nothing either to prove or disprove it.'

As Murdock and McCron write: 'The deficiencies of William Belson's research are the deficiencies of a whole tradition of inquiry, which trivialises the problem of social violence by providing unimaginative answers to a narrowly conceived set of questions. There is no doubt that the relations between television viewing and violent behaviour are an important area for research. But it is only by starting with social relations, rather than with television, that we will get a true measure of its importance and impact.' With the Belson book the academic tradition has once more given hostages to fortune.

'It might well be the ethics of shows like *Sale of the Century* that encourage anti-social behaviour.'

It seems to me that the contributions made by Eysenck, Nias and Belson belong to a sterile academic tradition which would be best ignored from here on in. It creates a perfect moral panic—a smokescreen which effectively masks a whole range of important issues about television's functions and effects in the society from public debate. For over a hundred years every popular form of entertainment has stood accused of fostering crime and violence. The crime and violence, of course, are committed not by the accusers but by others on whose behalf the accusers worry. And it was not long before, as McLuhan says: 'Even the dumbest of criminals learned to say "It wuz comic books done this to me!"'

As long as the range of academic work remains hooked on violence it will be of little use. As Murdock and McCron point out, it might well be the ethics of shows like *Sale of the Century* that encourage anti-social behaviour. Or it could be, as Anthony Smith suggests, that television has performed miracles increasing the general level of kindness in the society. It's likely we will

never know enough about media effects, but we can nevertheless still proceed to make some decisions about the media themselves.

We could take the Belson line that no violence whatever should appear on the screen, thus rendering television even less capable of seriously commenting on the world than it is already. (And in taking his line, we could still ignore his research.) Or we could take the libertarian line which argues any policy on violence to be the thin end of the censor's wedge, naively ignoring the very real limitations on broadcasting which exist and denying the arguably proper responsibilities broadcasters ought to have for the society they serve.

Or we could do the following: Let's assume that television does have some effects, although we cannot be at all precise about what they are. Let's assume that for most people these effects do not include imitating screen behaviour and certainly not deviant screen behaviour such as violence. Similarly let us assume that for most people (including the young) such deviant screen behaviour does not trigger anti-social behaviour of a different kind. (And let's forget about desensitisation, or at least admit that modern life, apart from the television, can be desensitising—not to say alienating—enough.)

But on commonsense grounds let us admit that there are among us those for whom all this might not be true. So just as for most of us we can assume that television will encourage us to use soap powders and the like, let us assume for these sociopaths that television might well encourage them to violence. And, therefore, without hypocrisy or prevarication (or research results), let us lay firmly on the broadcasters' shoulders a duty of care and ask that (at least) the endless succession of 'sanitised' and unnecessary 'jeopardies' that go to make up too much of our prime time output be cut out.

This implies that certain types of violence justified artistically or on the grounds of the public's right to know would be transmitted, even though on commonsense grounds we might think it possible for sociopaths to misuse such media messages. That might be a risk which we as a society would be willing to take. This view is, in effect, the one the rhetoric of Code and Note suggest. But it's not the one adopted in practice, where one-off plays like *Scum* on the brutality of Borstals get banned but not series like *Target*, which blatantly copy U.S. models to very little purpose and even less entertainment.

Can such distinctions be made and be made to stick? Of course they can, because it is absurd for broadcasters, living in a society ruled by law, to claim that no binding codes of practice can be drawn up. We should shake out of the Code and Note their entrenched libertarianism and let them stand as rules with agreed areas of permissiveness, agreed forms of presentational warnings and the like. There should be no more waiting on the confused results of dubious research before this is done. And when we have made this decision as a society we should write 'Finis' on 'violence' as the only aspect of broadcasting regularly to make the headlines and, setting about a more comprehensive examination of the ideology of our most pervasive medium, seek ways to prevent it reducing the real face of human bestiality to the cosiness of a soap-like *Holocaust*.

A Bullet in the Head

from page 84

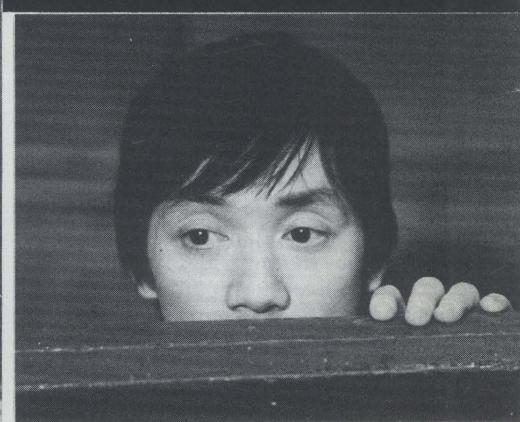
agonise about his experiences, in fact he deliberately plays them down. 'How does it feel to be shot?' 'It doesn't hurt,' Michael tells Stan, 'if that's what you want to know.' But when he learns from the numbed and temporarily incapable Angela that Steven, from whom he became separated in Vietnam, has been returned home to a veterans' hospital, Michael finds that he lacks the courage to dial Steven's number. (This scene parallels the earlier one in which Nick, after his discharge from hospital, could not bring himself to telephone Linda.) Returning to the bungalow, Michael packs and prepares to leave. Linda, her arms full of groceries for a celebratory dinner, proposes instead that they go to bed: 'Can't we just comfort each other?' They drive to the riverside motel; a train rattles past; they fall asleep in each other's arms.

Running as a subtext through the lives of the film's main characters is the notion that masculinity is inextricably linked to the drinking of liquor, the possession of firearms and the killing of deer. Stan, the inveterate womaniser who doesn't go to the war, makes up for it by always carrying a gun, 'just in case'. Michael, for all his calm knowledgeability and his insistence on correct hunting procedure, goes to Vietnam a virgin (or so Stan intimates); and it's only on his return, when he again goes hunting and at the last moment discovers that he cannot shoot a buck, that he finds it possible to consummate his love for Linda. Cimino does not let the key moment when Michael renounces killing go unmarked: 'Okay,' Michael yells into the echoing wilderness, perched on an escarpment beside a roaring waterfall. Furthermore, it is only now that Michael finds himself able to visit Steven, who has lost his legs and the use of one arm, and promises to bring him home to Clairton.

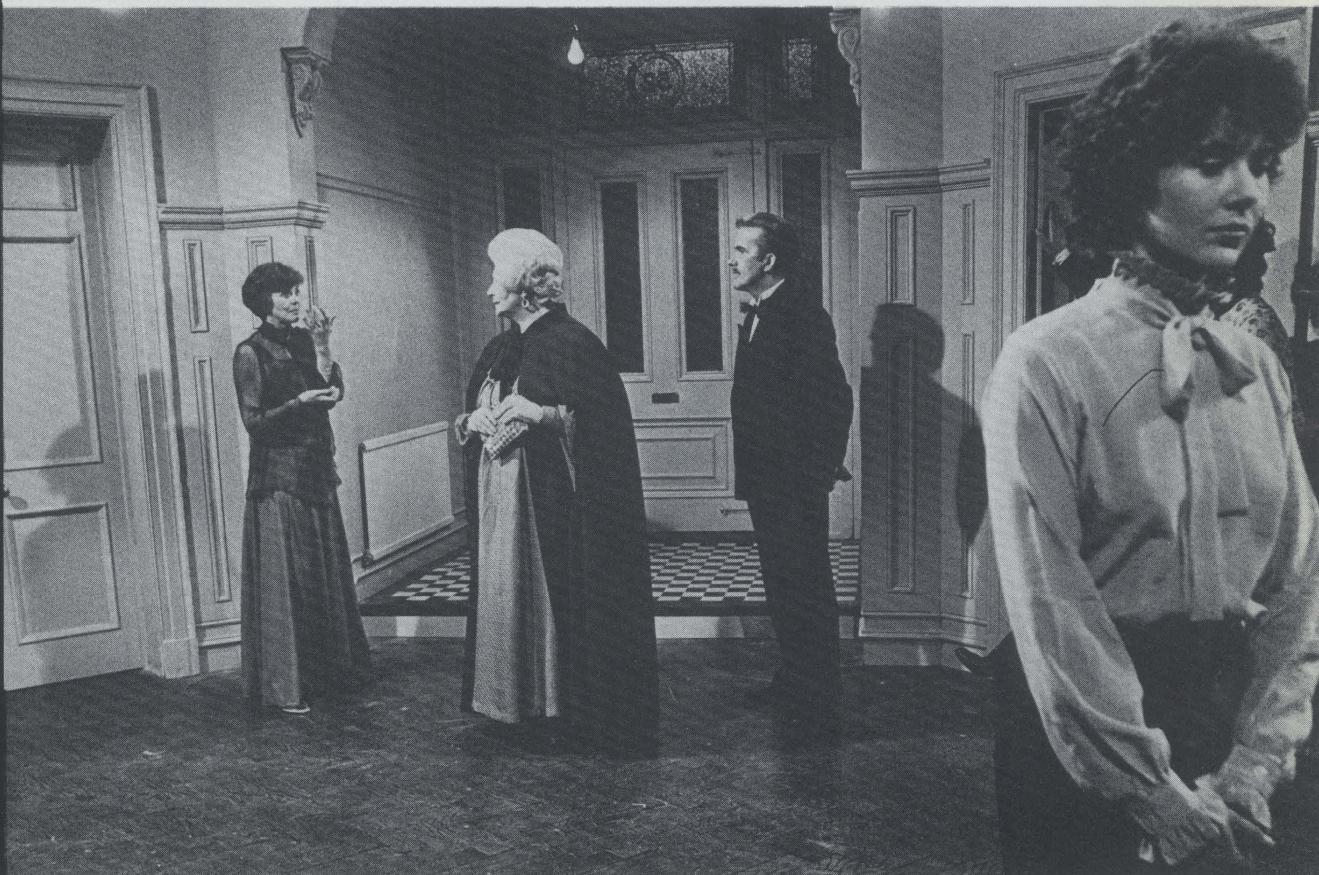
The film winds down inexorably. Michael returns to Vietnam in 1975: Saigon is about to fall. Having learned that Nick has been sending Steven bundles of \$100 bills (his winnings from games of Russian roulette), Michael runs Julien the fixer to earth and bribes his way first into the gaming house (this requires another river journey) and then, when Nick doesn't recognise him, into the game itself. The full irony of this suicidal sport—a variation of the 'one-shot' deer hunt that Michael previously espoused—now takes on genuinely tragic proportions. And Cimino broadens the irony: the Americans are leaving the city, and a TV clip shows a helicopter crash on the deck of an American attack carrier. The two friends face each other over the table: 'I love you,' Michael says, pulling the trigger on an empty chamber; a flicker of recognition crosses Nick's eyes (his arms indicate for the first time his addiction to heroin), but when Nick next raises the pistol to his head his luck finally runs out. The film's coda takes place in Clairton: Nick is buried and expiation is complete. The remaining friends (Steven and Angela are now reconciled) gather at John's bar for the wake breakfast: clumsy with grief they raise their glasses to Nick's memory and then, in a moment that is at once ironic, affirmative and unquestioningly moving, they sing 'God Bless America'. The frame freezes.



The Bennett plays



Above: Alan Bennett with Prunella Scales ('Doris and Doreen'). Above right: Dave Allen, Robert Stephens, Eiji Kusuhara in 'One Fine Day'; Henry Man in 'Afternoon Off'. Right: Isabel Dean, Elspeth March, John Moffatt, Jenny Quayle in 'The Old Crowd'



John Russell Taylor

It is no longer the fashion to ask what plays are about. Except, possibly, at the BBC, where, Alan Bennett says, they seem at the moment to favour plays that make very direct statements and come to conclusions. Which may be why, as the story goes, the BBC turned down the six plays which have recently been done instead as a sequence by London Weekend Television. (The story, as usual, is simplistic: the BBC actually offered to do three of them, one a year, starting maybe this year; at the time they were sitting on a fourth which they had bought a while before.) But then television is, as they keep saying, a writer's medium rather than a director's, and the question may still be of use in pin-pointing just what is satisfactory or unsatisfactory in a play. Certainly, if it suggests itself as relevant it should not be brushed aside. With this sequence, or some of them at least, it suggests itself rather strongly. What is the play about? Is it about enough? Is it, finally, about what the playwright wants it to be about and thinks it is about? Then, but not before, one may be able to ask also whether all this matters.

For a start, though, a few more practical details about what the sequence is, and how the plays fit together. Certainly the six of them were never conceived as a sequence. Three, perhaps: whichever three were initially offered to the BBC. But the idea of six together seems to have been the brainchild of Michael Grade, mainly because six would be easier to sell than three or four. Nevertheless, Tony Wharmby, the executive producer, considers that they hold together as a series, and even that the precise order in which they are shown is significant, setting up as it does resonances, repetitions, meaningful references forward and back. To be unkind, one might say that this is to an extent making a virtue of necessity. Bennett does have his little jokes, his favourite little lines of dialogue, and it is difficult to tell whether the lady whose stomach is on a knife-edge constitutes a meaningful cross-reference between the first play, *Me! I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and the second, *Doris and Doreen*, or whether Bennett is just repeating himself.

Certainly, however it came about, there is a network of verbal reminiscences and cross-references among the plays, which are otherwise fairly miscellaneous. Three of them, *Me! I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Afternoon Off* (number 4) and *All Day On the Sands* (number 6), are meticulously notated pictures of life in the North, the first set very specifically in Sheffield and the other two in Morecambe. The first is largely, and the other two entirely, shot on film. Number 5, *One Fine Day*, is also shot on film, but takes place equally specifically in London and is, unlike the rest, hardly comic at any level. Numbers 2 and 3, *Doris and Doreen* and *The Old Crowd*, are both shot entirely on videotape, in the studio, and are very different again in style and content, both from each other and from the rest of the six. *Doris and Doreen* is an approach to Theatre of the Absurd, a day in the life of cogs in some unspecified bureaucratic machine, in some unspecified office location. *The Old Crowd* is even more abstract—a sort of surrealistic farcical tragedy set among the crumbling relics of the upper classes in a still unfurnished house about two hours from Horsham.

What, then, do the plays have in common? They are all, one way and another, about *temps mort*, betweenwhiles, when nothing is happening. It has been said that they are all about crisis points, when people's lives take a

decisive change of direction. But if so, this usually happens off-screen, or right at the end of the play, almost imperceptibly prepared for. The only real exception to this is *One Fine Day*, which is also in certain respects the most ambitious, and certainly the most cinematic, of the six. It is perhaps not entirely accidental that the title has echoes of Olmi, whose *Un Certo Giorno* was called the same in English. And the piece is not unlike an Olmi's-eye view of 8½—the Italian references being reinforced by the constant quotations from Puccini on the soundtrack.

It concerns—or seems to concern—our old friend of a few years back, the male menopause. George Phillips, head of the commercial property section of a large estate agents, is at the outset crumpled, listless, neurotically inactive. He hardly connects with other people at the office, gets nowhere with disposing of the company's white elephant office-block, contracts out of home life with his wife, who keeps herself busy with pointless evening classes, or his teenage son, who glumly brings home an equally uncommunicative girl for the night. Instead he withdraws to his Puccini, listened to on an earphone set. Later he withdraws still further, camping out on the unfinished top floor of his office block. Then, suddenly, he pulls himself together, gets busy selling the block, outwits the bright young man around the office and gets him sacked, and returns home to order his son's new girl-friend out of the house. The dangerous corner, it appears, is past.

At least, that is how I understand the script. The studio synopsis, without actually misdescribing what happens, makes it sound far different, as though everything follows crisply and surely from what went before and it is a simple social comedy. Maybe this is what Alan Bennett intended, though from his way with mere plot elsewhere I would rather doubt it. His hero seems as lost in his familiar world as the Chinese hero of *Afternoon Off* is marooned in wintry Morecambe with a smattering of English. Nothing seems quite to make sense to him except his (understandable) desire not to be bothered with the people around him. Whether his return to 'normality' at the end, by dint of reversing all the vaguely reasonable things he has done and disposing of the one possibly progressive, practical person in his company, should be regarded as a positive, let alone a happy, ending is a moot point. Perhaps he has just

decided that he loves Big Brother. But neither Bennett nor Stephen Frears, who directed this one (and three of the others, as well as producing all six), seems to be hinting at such a cynical or despairing conclusion. Olmi has always got into trouble with the left for apparently endorsing, or at least accepting, the company ethos; Bennett and Frears, on this evidence, could join him in the liberal doghouse.

Where the piece does not finally work very well is not in its overall conception (if we do not ever feel we know for sure what the play is about, there is no reason why, in that sense, we should), but in its lack of specificity. Bennett's talent seems essentially (1) comic and (2) realistic. *One Fine Day* is almost entirely lacking in the little memorable details of dialogue and the tiny, quirky observations of how people really live and behave (especially in the North) which enliven the best of Bennett's work, and the best of these six plays in particular. It is as though, in elaborating his grand design for this, the most 'serious' and the longest of the series, he has deliberately denied himself the miniaturist detailing which usually serves him best. As he says of his own plays, 'They wander, they joke and they don't reach many conclusions.' This one wanders too little, jokes too little, and reaches a conclusion which implies conclusions.

All this reflects back on the play most unlike *One Fine Day* in the set, *The Old Crowd*. While it is difficult to know quite what one should label *One Fine Day*, which is written and directed entirely like what we would normally call a film, *The Old Crowd* is definitely, even defiantly, a play. It is written in artificially measured tones; it is played like high comedy, or at least high farce. Anyway, I suppose that is how it is played; what that means in practice is that it is played with the sort of tranced slowness English actors assume when they have little idea what they are talking about but are sure it is very sophisticated and probably fraught with deep significance. Admittedly, with London Weekend's publicity machine going into top gear, it might have been difficult at the time of the show's screening to approach it without preconceptions of some sort. (I hasten to add that I saw a preview, knowing nothing of the fuss which was to follow.) We were told that it had cost a quarter of a million pounds, which is apparently unprecedented for a taped studio production of just over an hour; that it was very experimental; and that Lindsay Anderson, who directed (his first on tape, they said, though presumably the television version of *Home* was also taped), called it 'anti-television', 'destroying the myth of the television play', and presumed it was going to prove somewhat beyond television audiences. In the circumstances, it was hardly avoidable that critics and public might get their backs up a bit, and demand a masterpiece or nothing.

So, the worst that anyone could possibly say was perhaps what I heard said at the preview: after a long pause, on the way out, 'Well, it's a nice little play... Bit long...' In Bennett's work it is probably nearest to *Habeas Corpus*, which he describes as 'a very mannered kind of farce'; in Anderson's, it comes closest to his production of Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw*. In general, it comes closest—too close for comfort,

indeed—to a poor man's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. Much the same image of a present or slightly future society is offered, with creeping chaos within the walls of the empty house (the furniture has vanished on the way and the ceilings crack ominously, while the servants start to rehearse the uprising down in the kitchen), and outside the strange virus which kills in hours, holes opening in the streets and rabies in Burgess Hill.

And the people, as in Buñuel, try to go on behaving naturally, as though nothing untoward is happening. If it were played at a reasonable speed it might work better, but the emphases are so theatrical—in the worst sense of the term, and in a way, strangely, that Anderson's theatre work hardly ever is—and there is so much posing around, big entrances and exits accompanied by peculiarly obtrusive snippets of Mickey-Mousing music, that the life of the thing oozes out through the cracks. There are, it is true, extraordinary moments, like the whole episode in which Frank Grimes, one of the out-of-work actors doubling as servants for the evening, makes kinky advances to Jill Bennett's foot under the table, then meets her upstairs for some hanky-panky under the unconcerned gaze of Cathleen Nesbitt, who is far more interested in her television set. Rachel Roberts howling with desire for her young adopted nephew is also a curious effect, somewhat muffed in the execution. But most of the play is arid and sterile. Very well, it is mirroring arid and sterile lives, but it is desirable in such circumstances that the medium should not be too infected by the message.

It is perhaps in some attempt to remedy this that Lindsay Anderson has introduced a few showy effects in the direction: occasions—maybe half a dozen of them—where the camera follows characters round four sides of a three-walled set to reveal the technicians off-set, or catches the crew reflected in a mirror or, at the climactic death scene, cranes up and away to show the whole extent of the set and the monitors flickering above. There is also one period of about thirty seconds when the action for no apparent reason goes into black-and-white, then returns to colour. The latter effect I cannot explain except as a little 'in' reference to *If...* and other Anderson films, but the former I suppose is meant to produce a sort of Brechtian distancing and underline the artificiality of the whole dying society depicted (rather as Ken Russell explained that people kept losing their trousers in his television version of *The Diary of a Nobody* to symbolise the shaky basis of Victorian bourgeois society).

Whether these devices work is clearly a matter of taste; to me they seemed too stilted and self-conscious to carry any sort of effect at all. I suspect that if Anderson had simply filmed the whole thing, or gone to the other extreme and treated it like a stage play which would then be recorded in the usual rather arbitrary way by four cameras in continuous performance, it would have worked far better. But such a weight of thought about television and its myth could hardly at the best of times be supported by Bennett's polished but fragile text.

The other scripts in the series come to varying degrees into the same medium-vs.-message

bind. They all concern boredom and emptiness and the aimless filling up of time, and have to do it, naturally, without being in themselves boring and aimless. *Doris and Doreen*, the other one done entirely on tape, is able to overcome this, to a large extent, by being very thoroughly, unashamedly theatrical: it is in effect a two-character play built much along the lines of early Ionesco and Adamov plays, with the two clerks endlessly arguing about administrative grades, shuffling pink and green forms from tray to tray; and then, with the fascinated horror of a rabbit hypnotised by a snake, watching the inexorable approach of their fate, computerised redundancy. This is very much actors' television, brilliantly managed by Prunella Scales and Patricia Routledge; and Alan Bennett and Stephen Frears provide merely the slight framework, making the very lack of action into an advantage by deliberately using it, Theatre of the Absurd-style, to play on our nerves.

The other three scripts are naturalistic film comedies shot on location (bar a few noticeably taped scenes in *Me! I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf*). The two Morecambe plays are like a matched pair. *Afternoon Off* is a winter play, about the hopeless quest of a Chinese hotel worker for a girl called Iris, who is alleged to like sallow skins and may therefore gratify his interest in bed without too many preliminaries beyond the box of Milk Tray he clutches in his hand. It is frankly episodic, with the uncomprehending Lee as the still centre and occasional catalyst in a succession of scenes from provincial life, drawn with sharp observation and sometimes mordant humour. The only thing wrong with it is that it does go on a bit, though very prettily shot (by Stephen Frears again) and immaculately acted.

Much the same verdict would apply to the summer Morecambe play, *All Day on the Sands*, directed by Giles Foster. It is a simple story of a day in the life of a small private hotel with pretensions (beautifully captured in the Portofino Room with its hanging chianti bottles and the owner's constant commentary to guests on his little loud-speaker system), and particularly of one family trying with painful refinement to hide the fact that the husband is unemployed. Bennett is particularly good at the minor tortures of keeping up a front, not being 'let down' in public by one's children, and clinging to the terminological niceties in which everyday jobs have to be clothed for one's own self-respect. And while winter Morecambe looks temptingly bizarre, summer Morecambe looks all too formic clad and unappealing—an oddity of which, one feels, Bennett entirely approves.

Which leaves the first and in every way the most successful of the pieces, *Me! I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. It could be regarded as a film, and would probably look pretty good on a smallish large screen—again, a comparison in tone and manner with Olmi and the Czech Forman films comes irresistibly to mind. But at the same time, with its technical mixture of film and tape, and its narrating voice (Alan Bennett's own) commenting intimately on the action, it does seem to belong with perfect conviction on television more than anywhere else: it achieves the theoretically desirable goal of being 'pure television' mainly by clearly working according to no theory and

not worrying itself at all about what it is. (If *The Old Crowd* worried less it would work far better.) It is a comedy-drama—again, categories do not matter—about a lost and lonely 35-year-old literature teacher in a Polytechnic who realises he is becoming a compulsive liar and chronic hypochondriac from sheer self-disgust and inability to connect with anyone around him. As the commenting voice says at one point, in the midst of a wonderfully awful scene of dutiful love-making ('Other people got foreplay; he got Bruckner') with the troll who teaches yoga, what Hopkins really wanted was someone who didn't want him, since his opinion of himself was so low he could have no respect for anyone who did not share it.

Into this drab and depressing life comes Skinner. Skinner is the only bright, irreverent, alive member of Hopkins' literature class where, the week in question, he is teaching E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf. Skinner's presence is a mystery: the only explanation he offers is that it is better than sitting at home watching colour telly with the wife and kid. Skinner frightens Hopkins—partly because, as the narrating voice tells us round the half-way mark, he does not yet realise that he loves him. And since this is a play with a happy ending, Hopkins ends up by, in some fashion, getting his man. Though common sense may tell us that the chances of a plain, middle-aged teacher being propositioned by the most evidently glamorous young member of his class (of whichever sex) are remote, still, the prospective coupling, overtly homosexual or not, of these two emotional and intellectual outsiders does make enough human sense to carry us over; and the vulgar gesture of the end, in which a freeze of the two faces is accompanied by a lusty rendition on the soundtrack of 'I'm In Love with a Wonderful Guy', does actually work like a dream.

In other words *Me! I'm Afraid of Virginia Woolf* pulls off what all six plays—indeed, all drama, I suppose—try to do: to take us by surprise and yet make us feel that everything is inevitable. It is, throughout, a beautifully crafted play, and one cannot help noticing that the jokey lines that recur elsewhere work best in this context because here they are furthest away from the spectre of the revue sketch, most closely integrated into a serious, though never solemn, observation of complex and thoroughly understood characters.

The series as a whole, by accident or by design, gives us a very fair conspectus of the range of effects and stylistic approaches available to television drama, and neatly forbids us to make any over-tidy generalisation. This is a film, and it works on television. This is theatre, and it works on television. This is neither (or both) and it works. This is neither (or both) and it doesn't. Possibly the slow development of *Afternoon Off* would look better if it were shown on a cinema screen, with the particular kind of concentrated attention that enforces. Equally, its extremely episodic structure might work against it more there than on a small screen. Film or tape or half-and-half (or for that matter live), it is all grist to television's mill. Perhaps the only myth of television drama is that there is no myth of television drama. And the sum total of the Bennett plays is two hits, two half-hits, two misses. Any more theory than that, and you are really in trouble.



FROM CALIGARI TO WHO?

Barry Salt



After months pursuing the trail of the German 20s through a hundred films, by way of the associated literature and the show of Neue Sachlichkeit painting, a solitary figure was wandering the streets somewhere between the National Film Theatre, the Goethe Institute, and the Hayward Gallery, and could be overheard talking to himself...

Why bother to go over all those questions again?

Because the answers may come out rather differently, and also in an attempt to salvage the concept of Expressionism so that it may be of further use. Expressionism is well on the way to having so many vague meanings attached to it that it could become meaningless, and also useless as an analytic tool, as has happened with 'realism'.

So what was Expressionism?

An artistic movement in German painting and literature that was well under way before the First World War started. It had nothing whatever to do with Hitler, who only got under way ten years later, after the war. Expressionist plays written by Fritz von Unruh, Georg Kaiser and others were performed with settings in the style of Expressionist painting during the last years of the war (1917-18) at a number of theatres in Germany. For a couple of years after the war a small minority continued to be very interested in manifestations of this movement, but by 1922 this interest was evaporating, and the number of periodicals devoted to Expressionist art and the number of performances of Expressionist plays were already in sharp decline, as was the production of this art. (The details can be read in John Willet's *Expressionism*, World University Press, 1970.) In other words, the Expressionist movement was in decline before the end of the period of German inflation and the beginning of the period of stabilisation in 1924, so there is no connection between these two things. Unless someone is suggesting that the decline of Expressionism caused the end of German inflation.

What was Expressionist cinema?

Six films made between 1919 and 1924: namely *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919), *Genuine* (Wiene, 1920), *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (K. H. Martin, 1920), *Torgus* (H. Kobe, 1921), *Raskolnikov* (Wiene, 1923) and *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (Paul Leni, 1924). These are the only films in which most features are indebted to Expressionist painting and drama. The only arguable addition to this list is Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926).

Is that all?

There is a fairly small number of other films that have one or two features derived from Expressionist art and drama, in particular Expressionist acting from a leading player. But does one raisin turn a suet dumpling into a Christmas pudding?

Well, no. But there are other things besides acting and set design that are special...

Top: bright light, heavy shadow and painted sets in Murnau's 'The Last Laugh'. Left: Christensen's 'The Mysterious X' (1914). 'Expressionist features' are found in this and other prewar Danish films



'Vanina': Asta Nielsen in the pose described, 'fluttering her hands'; below: Paul Wegener, with his shoulders 'pushed up around the ears'



No doubt you are thinking of things like extreme angles and looming shadows. But these would be better described as expressivist features, since they had already appeared and begun to develop well before the 20s in American and Danish cinema, and had no real connection with the rise of Expressionist art.

The uses of high- and low-angle shots and low-key and silhouette effects done with arc lights were developed in Danish films before and during the war, when the German industry was still small and feeble and its products less advanced in style. Although most people have nowadays heard of Benjamin Christensen's *Det Hemmelighedsfulde X* (1914), it is still not realised that that film is but one example in a line of development from the industry that dominated the German market up to 1917, and included amongst many Holger-

Madsen's *Spiritisten* (1915) with its spiritualist seance round a table (yes, you've seen that same high-angle shot in Lang's 1922 *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*), and August Blom's *Verdens Undergang* (1916), in which the rich divert themselves with spectacular stage shows while society collapses into chaos outside, and there are violent chases in black tunnels lit only by the light of a hand-held lamp, and so on and on. Expressivist effects such as atmospheric montage sequences of empty landscapes, and also superimpositions to denote subjective states, had simultaneously begun to appear in American films made by Maurice Tourneur and Cecil B. DeMille in 1917-18; and both also made use of shadow effects. No doubt some of these films, which were celebrated at the time, were shown in Germany after the war. All this seems to be unknown to everyone who has written on German cinema of the 20s.

This comes close to denying that there was anything special about the German films at all.

Oh no. Just that there was less than people who have looked at them out of context think. There were just a few films which pushed the expressivist features remarked on further than before: a longer series of dissolving superimpositions than anyone had used before to indicate a subjective mental state in Karl Grune's *Die Strasse* (1923); more looming shadows than ever before in *Schatten* (Arthur Robison, 1923); and more low-angle shots in *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett*. The first two of these have sets in the normal realistic style of the period, and even the illuminated signs that the protagonist of *Die Strasse* apparently feels menaced by were an actual feature of Berlin streets at the time. The performance of Eugen Klöpfer in this role is only slightly exaggerated, those surrounding him work right on the acting norms of the time, and the plot of the film, though derived from that of *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, has also been normalised by dropping the episodic construction and increasing the internal interconnections and naturalistic motivations of the action. The same sort of remarks could be made even more strongly about other films often described as Expressionist, namely *Vanina* (Arthur von Gerlach, 1921), *Hintertreppe* (Leopold Jessner, 1921) and *Scherben* (Lupu Pick, 1921). There are also a few other films whose only substantial connection with Expressionism is Expressionist-style acting from one or two of the leads.

But what was Expressionist acting?

At first glance Expressionist acting seems no more than bad old-style melodramatic acting done very slowly; and indeed that is what it is at second glance too, if one happens to be looking at any but the handful of first-rank German actors of the period. There was in fact an explicit theory of Expressionist acting, according to which broad and slow gestures amplified the emotions communicated to the audience, and gave them time to think about the emotions being felt by the characters in the play. This conception was probably erroneous even at the time, and is certainly so today. Owing to the elementary nature of Expressionist plots, the emotions the characters are likely to be feeling are only too simple and obvious, and can be guessed even in advance of the moment. But whatever kind of acting went on around them, great players like Conrad Veidt and Werner Krauss came up with an original twist to the physical details of their characterisations. A major theme on which variations were played by Expressionist actors was the use of the shoulders: held raised a little throughout by Werner Krauss in *Caligari*, held pushed forward by Ernst Deutsch in *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, pushed right up around the ears by Paul Wegener in *Vanina*, and so on.

A favourite despairing pose deriving from the acting in Expressionist theatre can be seen in a number of films from *Torgus* to *Hintertreppe*: standing erect but slackly with back against a wall, and allowing the head to drop and turn to one side. This was usually the high point of a female Expressionist role. The only actress who could meet the great male actors on their own ground was Asta Nielsen, though she never appeared in a true Expressionist film. Asta Nielsen had developed her own stylised and individual form



'Hinterstreppe': the actress strikes 'a favourite despairing pose deriving from the acting in Expressionist theatre'

of acting well before the first World War, and a moment from *Vanina* can show the way that original invention in the detail of highly stylised physical acting, even if not from an Expressionist actor, can redeem the lowest common denominators of the style. She is in a conventional pleading and anguished pose, leaning backwards with her arms stretched forwards parallel and close to each other, but just when one has had time to think that this pose was a cliché, her anguish rises to a peak and then she flutters her hands.

There is not much about Expressionist theatre in books on German cinema.

No, indeed. Even Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen*, which has a deal of pertinent information on the influence of Max Reinhardt on the German cinema, says nothing on this point. A glance at photographs of scenes from the plays *Die Wandlung* (written by Ernst Toller, designed by Robert Neppach for Karl Heinz Martin's production of 1919) and *Ein Geschlecht* by von Unruh produced in 1918 immediately shows the connection. In fact, Cesar Klein and Robert Neppach designed the films *Genuine* and *Von morgens bis mitternachts* respectively, the latter being directed by Karl Heinz Martin who had directed it on the stage in 1917. Since the early years of the century, the cinema had taken over plays that had recently been successful on the stage. What was unusual about Expressionist cinema was that what it turned into films was more avant-garde than had been the case before.

The exclamatory, telegraphic speech characteristic of Expressionist writing is of course missing from these films, which mostly have no intertitles. Admittedly Carl Mayer, the co-writer of *Caligari*, came to adopt the Expressionist style of writing in his scripts, but only after he had turned to writing what came out as non-Expressionist films with no visual correlatives to that jerky style. Though no doubt it impressed film producers. As we have now had an opportunity to see, the original script of *Caligari* is written in a perfectly conventional manner.

Some of the leading actors who appeared in Expressionist plays before 1919—Conrad Veidt, Werner Krauss, Ernst Deutsch, Paul Wegener, Emil Jannings and Heinrich George—took the acting style used in these plays into the films they appeared in during the early 20s.

Is that all?

Not quite. One later film has strong connections with the Expressionist theatre of the end of the war years that no one seems so far to have noticed. This is Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and the connections lie in the narrative rather than in the visual forms. *Metropolis* derives a large part of its major plot features from Georg Kaiser's trilogy of plays *Die Koralle*, *Gas I* and *Gas II*, produced in 1917, 1918 and 1920. These plays, which are set in the distant future, take place around a gigantic factory which provides power for the whole world. The leading characters in the first play are the Billionaire, owner of the factory, and his Secretary, who comes from the working class and is his identical physical double. In the course of the play the Billionaire kills the Secretary and takes his place, and his son rebels against his father and sides with the workers, taking a job as a stoker. In the second play the Billionaire's son is now operating the factory on a co-operative basis, but there is an explosion which destroys it . . ., and so on. Take all that, add touches from the future society of H. G. Wells' *Time Machine* and *When the Sleeper Awakes* and from *Der Golem*, add a dash of sentimental religiosity, stir, and you have *Metropolis*. In fact, *Metropolis* could be substituted for the first half of Kaiser's trilogy, which then could proceed on its existing course; and since this has been certified as anti-capitalist and 'progressive', it could be taken to confer the same distinction on *Metropolis* in prospective retrospect. If you insist on seeing things in those terms.

Well, no. But there still seems to be something distinctive about all those other films by Lang, and Murnau and . . .

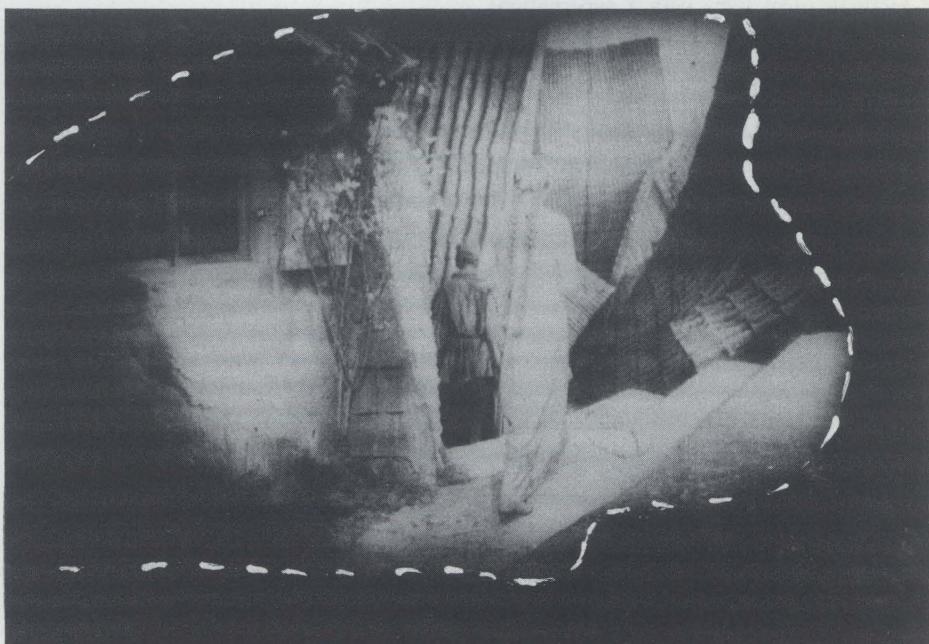
There is, indeed, in the same way that there is something special about earlier American

films by Maurice Tourneur and Erich von Stroheim. Someone has imposed a strong control over the total look of the film. In other countries at the beginning of the 20s there were at best one or two directors who could do this on the set. In Germany it quickly came to be standard procedure in quality films that all, or many, of the shots should be pre-designed by the art director, in some cases with collaboration from the director.

Although *Caligari* is one of the first films for which this happened, the visual style of this pre-designing was not restricted to a derivation from Expressionist painting. *Der müde Tod* has among its sources low-grade Art Nouveau and other early and late 19th century German painting (and also touches from Lubitsch's earlier costume films), as does *Die Nibelungen*; Lubitsch's *Die Puppe* (1919) uses 'Toy Town' stylisation of the sets; *Carlos und Elisabeth* (Richard Oswald, 1924) uses a balanced geometrical simplification of the details of its period décor, and so on. None of these films has any connection with the visual forms of Expressionist art; and they have no connection in any other way with the nebulous 'spirit' of Expressionism.

As for Murnau, it is a nice question to what extent he was responsible for the very distinctive 'look' of his most famous films, *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*), *Faust* and *Tartuffe*. As one can see from the pre-shooting sketches by Herlth and Röhrig reproduced in Lotte Eisner's *Murnau* (Secker and Warburg, 1973), the compositions of these films are fully realised down to the strange smudgy patches of lighter and darker greys scattered over the surface of the image. These smudgy patches, which came to be used on the sets of other German quality productions, may have been an invention of Herlth and Röhrig, for they first appear in embryonic form on the walls of the sets of *Der müde Tod* which they designed in 1921. By the time we reach *Tartuffe* (1926), this phenomenon had become much more marked in their work and completely dominated the image, rather than being incidental to its general pattern.

Murnau's 'Faust': smudges painted on to the sets are intensified by the use of light. The 'edging of fuzzy black "auze" (indicated here by the dotted line) merges into the other dark areas



At a casual glance one might think that the patterns of light and dark in these later films are true chiaroscuro (i.e., caused by the fall of light or its absence), but this is not so, as one can see from photographs of the sets taken under flat daylight. But the smudges painted on to the sets are intensified by soft-edged ellipses and circles of bright light cast on them in the actual shot in the later films. This was not the case in 1921, because the spotlights to do this were not then readily available in Germany. A third layer of dark smudge is added to the images in *The Last Laugh*, *Faust* and *Tartuffe* by an edging of fuzzy black gauze out of focus in front of the camera lens which integrates almost perfectly with the other dark areas. This fuzzy black edging to nearly every shot in *Tartuffe* prevents any camera movement, and also prevents the joining of shots by having a character walk out of the edge of the frame from one shot into the next. The characters are literally trapped inside the shot.

But isn't camera movement supposed to be a major feature of Murnau's style?

So say people who haven't really looked at the films, and who just copy ideas from one another's books. In fact there is hardly any camera movement of any kind in most of Murnau's films, and really a very limited amount in *The Last Laugh* and *Sunrise*. In the context of their various times, only *The Last Laugh* is the least remarkable in respect of camera movement.

You have been describing the kind of flat visual pattern in these films that . . .

Smudgy dark patches do not occur in Expressionist painting.

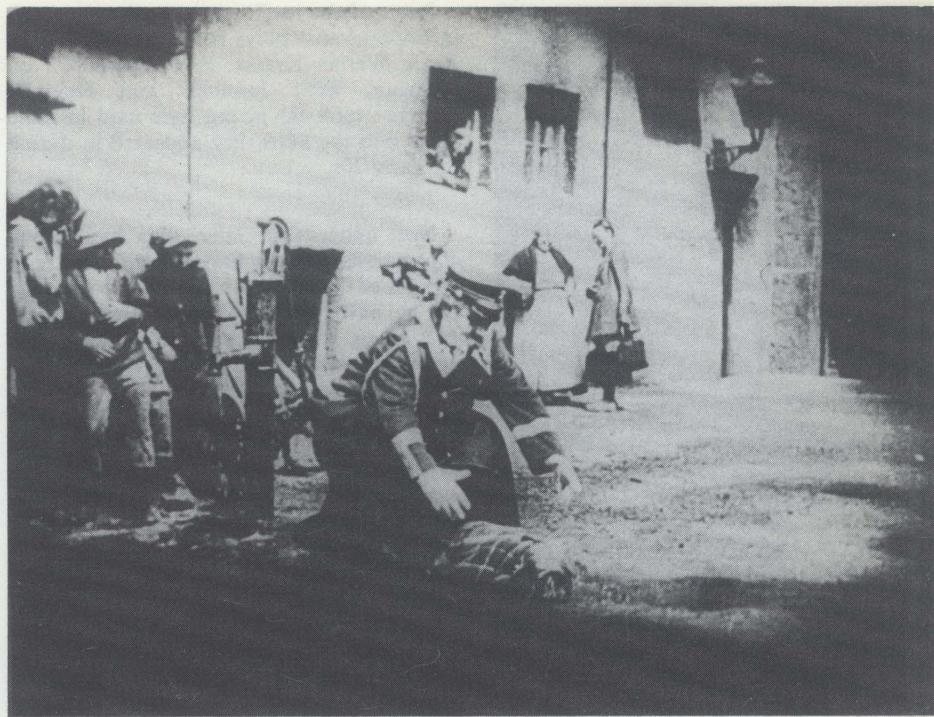
What about the supernatural element in German films of the 20s?

It is surprising how little there was, and most of that was fathered by two men, Henrik Galeen and Paul Wegener. Mostly working together, they were responsible for the conceptions, directions or scripts of *Der Golem* (1914 and 1919 versions), *Der Student von Prag* (1913 and 1926), *Nosferatu* (1922), *Peter Schlemil* (1919), *Das Wachsfigurenkabinett* (1924), *Alraune* (1928) and a couple of other less well-known films with supernatural stories. That is almost a clean sweep of German silent films with a supernatural element, except for *Caligari* and *Orlacs Hände* (1925). In the first the supernormal and horror elements are due to Hans Janowitz; and the second is a last desperate attempt by Robert Wiene to hit the jackpot again with some of the same ingredients which he fortuitously came to direct in *Caligari*. But note that *Orlacs Hände* takes nothing from Expressionism in its set design and most of it is quite conventional in its look, and also in the acting by everyone except Conrad Veidt.

Do ten films with a leaning to the supernatural out of a couple of thousand constitute a significant trend? (German production was well over two hundred films a year right through the 1920s.) To be fair, these supernatural films were more successful with the public than the Expressionist films which, with the exception of *Caligari*, nobody wanted to see at the time.

So that is why there were not more Expressionist films.

That is undoubtedly the main reason, but



'The Last Laugh': the 'third layer of dark smudge' again merges into heavy shadows

surely a subsidiary reason was that their basic form, which entailed filming a series of painted flats arranged perpendicular to the camera, left little to the initiative of the director and the cameraman on the set. For such sets had to be flatly lit in the main, or the painted patterns on them would be lost. Also it was almost impossible to change the camera angle, for that would have meant shooting out through the gaps between the flats at the side. What enterprising film-maker wants to be stuck in the position where all he has to do is guide the actors from one pre-designed place to another? And what can films that hardly anyone wanted to make, and hardly anyone wanted to see, tell us about the society they came from? However good they might be, do the films of the present-day avant-garde British structuralists give us access to the depths of national psychology?

Siegfried Kracauer says that the path leads From Caligari to Hitler.

...!
Control yourself!

From Caligari to Hitler is a strong runner in two crowded competitions: for the most worthless work of 'culture criticism' ever written, and for the worst piece of film history. It was written in a state of understandable hysteria during the Second World War by someone who had clearly seen no films made before 1919, and very few after that till the latter part of the 20s, as is shown by the numerous errors in descriptions and plot synopses. *From Caligari to Hitler* has all the usual faults of 'culture criticism' or 'cultural history' writ large—and often. Kracauer suppresses information that spoils his case; for instance that Expressionist films derive from Expressionist plays of the war years, and that hardly anyone wanted to see the group of truly Expressionist films. But worse than that, over hundreds of pages he repeatedly commits the irrationalities and illogicalities that invalidate culture criticism. First of all there is the error of using similar films to support opposite conclusions. To take just one example from among scores,

Kracauer claims that Ruttman's *Berlin, Symphony of a City* (1927) testifies to 'inner discontent with the system', but that *Melody of the World*, his completely similar film made three years later, indicates a 'desire to believe that all was well'. This is because Kracauer is intent on relating both films to the change in the economic situation that had taken place in that period, even if there is not visible evidence in them for this.

Secondly, there is the error of claiming that entirely different films demonstrate the same feature of the mass psychology of their time. Again to take one example from among dozens, two utterly diverse films of 1926, *Die Unheilichen* (The Illegitimate), by Gerhard Lamprecht, and Paul Czinner's *Der Geiger von Florenz* (The Florentine Violinist) are both claimed to be 'dreams' indicating the paralysis of the collective mind, though the first straightforwardly depicts brutalities inflicted on slum children, and the second is a typical ingeniously upholstered vehicle for Elisabeth Bergner, showing her wandering round picture postcard Italy in boy's clothes and falling in love with an artist.

Surely Kracauer gets something right?

Yes, the titles of the films, who directed them and most of their release dates. But his comments on stylistic aspects of film history are entirely wide of the mark. As I have already said, he is unaware of the way that the Germans only developed trends that were already in use elsewhere. Even after 1919 the Americans were still in the lead in the development of continuous heavy chiaroscuro, with films like Maurice Tourneur's *Victory* (1919) and Albert Parker's *Sherlock Holmes* (1922), and both these are carried out with a polish that the Germans could not match at those dates. At the same time, the French avant-garde of Delluc, Epstein, L'Herbier and others was independently developing expressivist devices such as soft-focus and superimposition, and the use of non-narrative shots of landscapes for mood effects, if anything ahead of the German filmmakers (i.e. before 1922). The best that



The fuzzy, masking effect has been adjusted here for the close shot

Siegfried Kracauer can do is to suggest that high angle shots were inspired by war photographs!

And as far as subject matter is concerned, Lang's *Dr. Mabuse* (1921-22) is no more than a vastly expanded version of the Danish and French master criminal thrillers which flooded the German market in pre-war days. All its features, except a passing joke about Expressionism, can already be found in those tales of Dr. Gar-El-Hama made at Nordisk, and of Zigomar directed by Victorin Jasset for Eclair. Lang's film is not even much of an improvement in craftsmanship, despite the several years of development there had been in film technique elsewhere.

Also, the oriental themes in German films of the early 20s that Kracauer makes much of had their precursors in some earlier American adventure films and in the Danish series of thrillers about the Maharajah's favourite wife and associated oriental skulduggery.

What happened later in the 20s?

The kind of gritty naturalistic detail that is beginning to develop in *Die Strasse*, and is fully under way in Dupont's *Varieté* (though somewhat obscured in the truncated American distribution print which most people see nowadays), has its parallel in Stroheim's *Greed* (1924); but it must be said that there were slightly more films made in Germany in the late 20s with this inclination than elsewhere. In fact, when one takes into account Gerhard Lamprecht's series of films from the 1925 *Die Verrufenen* (*Disreputable People*) onwards, as well as other little-known films such as *Die letzte Droschke von Berlin* (Carl Boese, 1926), one finds a continuous and well-filled line of naturalistic development towards *Menschen am Sonntag* (Siodmak and Ulmer, 1929). This is slighted in the history books, either because the authors want to relate everything to Expressionism if possible, or because they insist on looking at a few favourite and better-known films in isolation or in relation to a director's career, as is the case with Pabst's films.

The point about these more naturalistic depictions of life in the lower strata of German society is that they surely demonstrate some degree of social concern peculiar to that country which is incompatible with the 'psychological paralysis' that Kracauer dreamed up. He manages to conceal this line of development, which runs counter to his thesis, by fastening his interpretations on just a few plot points in a few of these films, and ignoring the rest.

So does this line of naturalistic development relate to *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* in painting?

Die Neue Sachlichkeit was not a coherent, organised and conscious movement in the way that German Expressionism was; indeed the application of the label was one of the earlier examples of the kind of cultural generalship by an art gallery director or similar person that have since become more common. As everyone in Berlin, Paris and London has had a chance to see in the last couple of years, the artists usually included under this description are a rather varied group, and many of them produced paintings nearly as unnaturalistic as those of the Expressionists. Most of those who produced the more naturalistic work show connections with Surrealism in their painting, and all this takes such art far away from the films considered above, which just carry naturalism a bit further than was usual in the average mainstream film of the late 20s. If they relate to anything in painting, it is to the kind of slightly sentimental realism which had been around for a long time before.

It seems that this group of films was more popular with the German audiences than the Expressionist films, though hardly a box-office smash, being merely on the edge of profitability.

What did the German audiences want to see?

In the early 20s, apart from American films, which were No. 1 as everywhere, they wanted to see obvious things like crime thrillers, Harry Piel adventure films, comedies of varying degrees of crudeness, and of course

Lubitsch films. Lubitsch was in fact the only German film-maker who had any idea about applying the contemporary American style of faster cutting to varied angles with free use of closer shots. Everybody else stuck to a more or less retarded style for years, using long takes shot from far back and with the few cuts being done straight down the camera axis. This was one of the principal reasons why German films were unsaleable in America, and also why Lubitsch and his films got to Hollywood as early as 1923. By 1925 other German directors were beginning to catch up, but the kinds of films German audiences wanted remained the same. They got them, but Kracauer refuses to investigate them.

There was just one group of films very popular with all levels of society which was unique to Germany, and which indicated the way popular feeling was going. This was the series of films about Frederick the Great. Kracauer first notes it with *Fridericus Rex* of 1923, but in fact it goes back earlier, at least to 1921 and *Die Tänzerin Barberina* by Carl Boese. Kracauer does devote a couple of scattered pages to a few of these films, but of course spends them on convolutions of 'psychological' interpretation of plot details when in fact the films speak loud and clear directly. They show Prussia ringed by hostile and scheming nations, and always include long scenes of Frederick reviewing his goose-stepping troops, banners flying. But that was all obvious to the meanest intelligence in Germany at the time, and not worth a fully-fledged German literary intellectual's ink.

In any case, the question that lies behind *From Caligari to Hitler* is rather different. It is: 'Why did the Germans, and in particular most of the working class, vote for Hitler and not for the Communist Party?' To a committed member of the left this is so inexplicable that it requires the irrational mental convolutions which Kracauer's book exemplifies.

But there must be a reason.

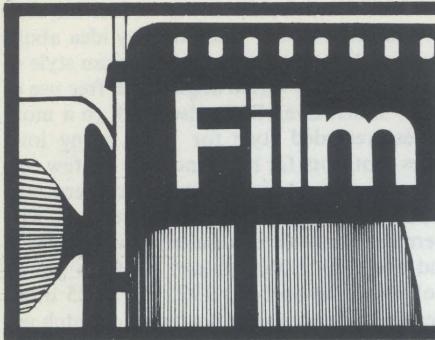
A short and simplified answer, to which the Frederick the Great films are a testimony, is that Hitler promised the Germans of all classes material progress and recovery of national pride. (Remember that the French held the Rhineland from 1923 till 1930, something Kracauer ignores.) The Communists offered the working class material progress, the middle classes material regress, and everyone absorption into the Communist International.

A historian interested in this question would not only go thoroughly into the Frederick the Great films, but also investigate other films that indicate fairly explicitly attitudes to the French. For such films, though not famous, existed in the 20s.

And the moral of the story?

Don't make generalisations about film history or history in films without taking into account all the films, and also without seeing a representative and sizeable sample of them. It also helps for the historian not to have a large axe to grind.

Thank you National Film Theatre, Goethe Institute, National Film Archive, and Arts Council of Great Britain (not forgetting the Blaue Reiter show of 1960 at the Tate Gallery) for this enlightenment.



Film Reviews

Comes a Horseman

Comes a Horseman (United Artists) is several contradictions in terms. It contains some of the most strikingly beautiful landscapes (superbly photographed by Gordon Willis) seen in any Western, yet most of its foreground action takes place in the shadows; it is characterised by extreme long shots, both exterior and interior, which instead of adding to its pictorial charm increase the feeling of melancholy and threat. One's frequent uncertainty about the distant figures appearing at the beginning of scenes is even summed up in the vague foreboding of the film's title. That Alan Pakula, after *Klute*, *The Parallax View* and *All the President's Men*, should return from the great outdoors with something almost as paranoid in tone is perhaps not surprising. What is remarkable, and very welcome, is his reinvigoration of the Western in the process. *Comes a Horseman* is in essence the oft-told tale of range war, though its terms have been subtly shifted by Dennis Lynton Clark's screenplay, and its impact and perspective thoroughly revised by the matters of style described above.

Even in its updating, the film retains an aura of ambiguity. Behind the opening credits, two cowboys, evidently new at the business, are seen rounding up cattle—the archetypal Western image lushly emphasised by Michael Small's otherwise unobtrusive score—then pausing at the sound of a rifle salute from the cemetery on a nearby hill. This latter scene, posed against a magnificent backdrop of mountains, is so suggestive a tableau that one almost expects the mourners to break into 'Shall We Gather at the River'. But the military trappings of the funeral, and then the push-button lowering of the coffin, immediately involve us in more recent history. The story takes place in the closing months of World War II, but the comment of one of the cowboys below—'We was the lucky ones. I thought we was gonna come back that way'—and later an even more embittered speech about patriotic wars, put Vietnam somewhere at the back of the picture of a divided community.

One of the mourners, Ella Connors (Jane Fonda), returns to the ranch she is struggling to keep from bankruptcy, and finds J. W. Ewing (Jason Robards), the local cattle baron whose son was just buried, waiting in her house. Their confrontation, over the predictable issue of whether she will be forced to sell out, has an unpredictably eccentric air: she stands silent, in mannish dress and pose, while he makes a proposal which has such an obsessive, oft-repeated air that it sounds like an attempted seduction ('You should've married me. We'd had a child. Be heir to it all... the whole basin'). As Ewing leaves, ignored, Ella walks through her house, the image for once close and claustrophobic and the music suddenly non-Western in its tinkly *Klute*-like intimations of madness brushing by.

If, for the moment, the staging of this scene seems gratuitously out of key, it is perfectly placed and extended by what follows. Ewing returns to his own more lavish ranch-house, only to find it 'invaded' as he had invaded Ella's. Atkinson (George Grizzard), the representative of money interests who have a hold over Ewing's land, talks about exploring the oil and mineral possibilities of the valley, over Ewing's protests ('This is heartland. Cattle country. And that's the way it's going to

stay'). His manner, and his ambivalent position as a 'guest', conjure a strange softness and intimacy about Atkinson's relationship with Ewing that belies their strictly business talk. But in effect, the two-way range war has become a three-way split, and if our introduction to Ewing has seemed to align him with such tyrants as Lionel Barrymore in *Duel in the Sun*, this scene again complicates the past with the present by revealing Ewing to be as idealistic as Ella about the pollution and destruction of the land.

By turning Ewing into a villain as much threatened as threatening, the makers have justified not only the hints of paranoia—the connection with the psychopathology of *Klute*—but the increasingly Gothic terms of their story. These are intimated by Pakula from the start in the long, static shots in which Ella's ranch-house seems perched at the edge of twilight while the distant hills are still brightly sunlit. The 'old dark house' imagery is conjured by the scene where Ella goes to the attic at night and contemplates an old doll's house replica of her ranch, and by the sense of family history that is equally invoked in Ewing's opulent drawing room, where Atkinson is pinioned in long shot beneath a Remington-style Western painting.

Family history, in fact, presses throughout on all the characters. Ewing talks of his grandfather as the patriarch who created this community, yet he seems to owe his own empire to the financial backing of Atkinson's father; Ewing and Ella's father were raised together 'like brothers instead of cousins'; and the intensity of Ella's hatred for Ewing is explained in her confession of how, as a girl, she once slept with him, an act which he then turned on her father as a weapon in their land war. Ewing's obsession with his 'house' becomes a dementia the equal of Roderick Usher's. 'Ever since

there's been Ewings,' he explains to his two constant henchmen, while preparing to recoup his losses, 'There's been Blockers and Coles at their side... through everything. Nestlers, rustlers, all our enemies.' And Pakula eventually gives full demonic measure to this triumvirate, as they ride through the smoke of destruction they bring down on Ella's home. Ewing's fate—dragged, already dying, off into the distance by his horse—looks as if it were the working out of a family curse, as well as being the final ironic invocation of the film's title.

A fourth division in this ancient feud is conceivably introduced with the two ex-soldiers-turned-cowboys seen at the beginning, who have bought some land from the unwilling but deeply indebted Ella, and now stand between her and Ewing. One of them is quickly killed; the other, Frank Athearn (James Caan), is brought wounded to Ella's ranch, where she makes it clear that she wants neither freeloaders nor partners. That she eventually enters into uneasy alliance with him is no surprise; nor that her fierce self-reliance and mistrust (a paranoia the equal of Ewing's) should soften into a romantic involvement (Ford again, as she trades jeans and shirt for a dress in an open-air square dance sequence). It is more unusual, however, that Athearn should function less as a hero than as a kind of balance between the two sides. As an outsider, he is already in danger of bearing the brunt of their inverted (and incestuous) hostilities, and can see their conflict with a degree of detachment. But the film turns Caan's slow-burning, wryly bemused air to rare advantage. He is at once the most passive figure and the essential middle term in this drama, the man of reasonableness and reason who refuses to be drawn into confrontation with Ewing at Ella's hot-headed insistence, and who (only half-jokingly) plays devil's advocate when she turns away the oil men by indicating what oil money could do for her.

Athearn is scarcely given prominence by the narrative, but his presence in a way provides the equilibrium on which Pakula's own detached, quizzical perspective rests. For, despite its inherent melodrama and run of gloomy imagery, *Comes a Horseman* has a succinctly contemplative, measured air. Madness sneaks up on it slowly, and seems to have more to do with a certain tilt of the landscape and quality of light than with the neurotic fervour of *Klute*—or of that earlier Pakula-produced Western *The Stalking Moon*. Its construction suggests a mosaic, combining past and present, the romance of the traditional Western

'Comes a Horseman': Jane Fonda outside the burning ranch-house



boxed-in by a new fatalistic structure (the camp-fire that is doused in the very first shot anticipates the burning embers to which Ella's home will be reduced at the end). In an odd way, its stylistic counterpart might be *Providence*, which as wilfully interleaves time and place and also finds an old expressionist refuge, the house of *Kane*, for its dying patriarch. But Pakula's signature, finally, is probably the odd reversal of perspective; the moment when his perfectly modulated exterior view suddenly opens up, for instance, in the single shot in which Ella peers into the recesses of the ranch-house miniature in the attic, a moment that compresses the sadness of a childhood spent growing towards this adult obsession.

RICHARD COMBS

The Chess Players

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Satyajit Ray's *The Chess Players* (Connoisseur) is the ambivalence with which Ray views the matter of politics and progress, recalling the fact that twenty years ago, in *Jalsaghar*, he demonstrated how an aristocratic landowner's irredeemable social negligence might yet aspire to a state of grace through his overruling delight in beauty. There, more overtly but no more inescapably than in the new film, Ray's direction recorded the death of a way of life, a suicide willingly undertaken because pure beauty cannot survive untarnished in a crassly material world.

Concentrating exclusively on the two noble chess players, who care for nothing but the game and blithely play on while the East India Company completes its strategy for a bloodless takeover of the last independent Indian state in 1857, Premchand's original story made no secret of the message it intended to convey. Indeed, wryly fulminating against the cult of pleasure instilled in his people by the Nawab of Oudh, the story echoes the one-sided view expressed in the film by the British Resident, General Outram (superbly played by Richard Attenborough with a soft Scottish burr and a sharp Presbyterian conscience). 'Apathy was writ large across every aspect of life': small wonder, then, that Oudh should lose its independence and the British Empire gain a priceless chattel.

Ray, however, splits his viewpoint three ways (or perhaps four, if one considers the unspoken voice accorded to the common people, condemned to drudgery as servants and no doubt to poverty as an inevitable corollary to the splendours of the court). Two of these, represented on the one hand by the montage sequence which sketches a concise but enormously expressive account of Britain's relationship with Oudh, and on the other by the tale of the two chess players, are governed by the historical determinants of British colonial arrogance and India's obliging submission to superior technology. Rendered economically essential by the mounting financial weight of colonial expansion, the annexation of Oudh is already a *fait accompli* in which the Nawab's consent is required merely as a matter of form. Meanwhile, disdainfully amused by the hustling manners and mores of the British, both chess players (two more brilliant performances by Saeed Jaffrey and Sanjeev Kumar) nevertheless remain respectfully subdued by the wonder of imported railway trains and telegraph wires. And contrary to his usual concern for the respect due to his characters' lives (here, for instance, their potentially painful marital problems are raised in order to further the plot, then left in the air in the traditional manner of farce), Ray treats both characters essentially as caricatures to match the cartoon basis of his historical montage.

In a sense, therefore, these two 'viewpoints' cancel each other out: if the march of progress is inevitable in the wake of the British Empire, equally inevitable is the fact—for all the chess players' stout insistence that they will play today but fight tomorrow—that India is not going to find the will to resist. And here Ray's third voice comes in, expressed by the arts whose fantastic flowering under the Nawab Wajid Ali Shah turned Lucknow



'The Chess Players': Sanjeev Kumar, Saeed Jaffrey

into the treasure-house of Moslem culture. Not always entirely accessible to the untrained Western ear, the intrinsic grace of the Nawab's personal achievements (poems, songs, operas, dances) is nevertheless inescapable in the camera's rapt attention as Outram's aide recites and clumsily translates a poem (remaining coldly askance as Outram drily comments, 'Doesn't strike me as a great flight of fancy, I'm afraid'); in the reverence with which the Nawab's prime minister waits for a kathak dance to end before informing him of the East India Company's disastrous ultimatum; and above all, perhaps, in the way Wajid Ali Shah's music and his throne are woven together (by way of two songs inspired by its presence) in a dazzlingly poetic definition of regality.

Ray, of course, is not naive enough to suggest that artistic talent compensates for misrule, or that if the peasant has no bread he can eat opera. His Wajid Ali Shah (Amjad Khan) is the first to admit that his administration has been poor and that in this he has been a bad king. Not stooping to bandy logic like his mother, who very pertinently asks Outram why the East India Company did not guide her son with advice if they felt his administration was lacking, Wajid Ali Shah is nevertheless well aware of the mousetrap into which he has been coerced. Recalling that he once behaved as a real king, raising an army to defend his frontiers (engagingly, his memory also conjures a regiment of 'pretty girls in pretty dresses on pretty horses') only to be told not to bother as British troops would take care of all that, he neatly summarises the colonial dilemma: 'What will the king do then, if he doesn't bother about his kingdom?'

His answer, found on the throne to which one of his songs came like a mysterious gift, was to express his innermost self, and by so doing, to turn Lucknow into a garden of happiness and beauty. If it also contained its quota of the unhappy and underprivileged, his defence is stout: 'I've been a bad king. If my people had come to me and said so, if they said you're making us suffer, we don't want you, I would have cast away my crown then and there. But they didn't. Because I went out to them and showed them my true self. I was not afraid to show them what kind of a king I was. Even after ten years I can see the love in their eyes. And they love my songs. They sing them!'

To Outram, as a foreign potentate who flies kites, dances like a nautch girl, and keeps harems of concubines for his pleasure while staunchly observing his prayers five times a day, Wajid Ali Shah remains an enigma, never more so than in their final confrontation. Having already decided to disband his army rather than spill his people's

blood by offering resistance, he cannot bring himself to abdicate in answer to foreign pressure, and instead hands Outram his turban: 'I can bare my head for you, but I cannot sign that treaty.' Once again Wajid Ali Shah reveals his inner self, and Outram's outrage is the incomprehension of a man faced by a mute, alien mystery. Of a colonial administrator, in fact, faced by native resistance to political or cultural paternalism.

Unlike Premchand, Ray does not blame his two heroes for preferring the chessboard to the battlefield. Engagingly fantastical (much of the film is wonderfully funny, especially when, after losing their chess set to a disgruntled wife, the pair are frustrated in their attempts to borrow another by the untimely death of its owner and are reduced to improvising pieces out of fruit, nuts and spice bottles), their pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of strife is just as Wajid Ali Shah would have wished. The one point on which a hint of censure glimmers is their unthinking failure to preserve, like Wajid Ali Shah, their *Indianess* against the threat of takeover. At the very end of the film, after the British troops march past on their way to Lucknow, the chess players settle down to another game as a distant bugle blows the retreat. 'Move over, Prime Minister,' says one, rearranging the pieces on the board, 'make way for Queen Victoria!' No longer are they playing chess as it was invented in India; already they have adopted the more expeditious English version of the rules.

TOM MILNE

Violette Nozière

Claude Chabrol's work in the five years since *Nada* has been marked by a casting about for new approaches. After the geographical distancing of his recent *Blood Relatives*, set in Canada, comes the historical distancing of *Violette Nozière* (Curzon), his only film with a period setting apart from *Landru* (1962) and the apparently impersonal *La Ligne de Démarcation* (1966).

Like *Landru* (comparisons with which are obviated not just by fading memory but by the mutilated state in which the movie was available in Britain), the new film takes for its subject a criminal *cause célèbre*. Even if its notoriety has, at least on this side of the Channel, been considerably muffled in the intervening years, the trial in 1934 of the teenage Violette on a charge of patricide was, if an incidental character in the movie is to be believed, the biggest such event in France since Dreyfus. But if the spectator's prior knowledge of the affair is

likely to be less than extensive, it is clearly not Chabrol's intention to provide a clarified case history. Perhaps significantly, historical documentation is provided only at the very end of the film. Ambiguity clings resolutely not only to Violette's motives (what her real feelings about her parents were; whether she also intended the death of her mother, to whom she administered a smaller dose of poison) but to the facts themselves. We are never sure, for instance, whether Violette's natural father was indeed the prosperous figure who sends her letters and gives her what seems to be hush money.

The tone of the opening, detailing Violette's stealthy nocturnal departure from the scene of the crime, is that of a thriller, mesmerisingly Hitchcockian in its camera style (and possibly one may detect a specific echo of the start of *I Confess*, a film Chabrol especially admired). Flashbacks ensue, summoning up Violette's double life between the claustrophobic pseudo-gentility of her parents' working-class apartment and the ritual exhibitionism of the bar-room hangers-on in the Quartier Latin, and between the dowdily well-scrubbed schoolgirl of her parents' wishes and the carmine-lipped voluptuary of her forays into amateur prostitution with a succession of callow students.

Intriguing as these revelations are, however, the inconsequentiality of their assembly is far removed from the thriller's rigorous patterning of events, and the film's unbalancing oddity of construction is emphasised by the fact that the flashbacks continue at random beyond the point—rather more than halfway through the movie—at which they meet up with the initial action. Not only this, but the obsessive doubling back within the time scale is echoed by a secondary chain of memory flashes, arbitrary and unexplained, to episodes (possibly imaginary) in Violette's childhood, whose strangeness lies not only in an exaggeratedly high-key lighting scheme quite different from the rest of the film but in the fact that Isabelle Huppert sometimes appears bizarrely as a pigtailed representative of Violette's younger self.

Even in primary narrative terms, Chabrol defuses the suspense latent in the material—in Violette's clumsy effort to cover up the crime by returning to the apartment and turning on the gas, or in her subsequent attempts to evade arrest. She is, in fact, turned in to the police by a self-appointed *agent provocateur* on the pretext of a park bench assignation, in a scene which both visually echoes Chabrol's early *Les Bonnes Femmes* and functions as a parodically mundane Gethsemane. And when the trial is eventually reached, the film elides it entirely, save for the verdict.

Violette Nozière: Isabelle Huppert, Jean Carmet



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Together with this shifting formal structure, though, a Langian strain of determinism can unmistakably be discerned in the film. This is evinced in the motifs of railings and stairs, particularly the stair well in the Nozières' apartment building, in the architectural stress on enclosure (Chabrol here makes a virtue of necessity in respect of the limitations imposed on location shooting by a period subject), and in the recurrence, when the action does briefly move outdoors, of grey skies and gaunt, leafless trees. Similarly, it is in dramatic terms ironically fitting that Violette's ambition to ride in a Bugatti is realised only in the immediate aftermath of the murder, and that the well-heeled revellers who give her a lift back to the apartment house and her futile attempt to outwit the law should be off to visit a friend called Janine, the name of the imaginary well-off companion with tales of whom Violette had assuaged her parents' desire for her to go up in the world.

To this extent, Violette, enmeshed in a net of social contradictions, becomes a heroine fit for a latterday Zola, a correspondence coincidentally heightened by the fact that her father is an engine driver, as well as by the theme of hereditary syphilis. Violette has persuaded her parents that they are responsible for the venereal disease she has contracted, and the poison is administered in the guise of medication. Certainly, Chabrol refuses his protagonist any aura of tragedy: Violette may aver to the shady operator to whom she attaches herself that love is nothing without grandeur, but her own capacity for grandeur seems scarcely greater than his. Yet if the romantic bravura of her claim when they first meet to have dreamed of him emerging from the sea is at one level sardonically undercut by Chabrol's illustration of this dream in terms of the cheap painted seascape in the hotel room she uses for prostitution, it acquires a kind of pathos in the light of the later scornful remark by one of her male associates to the examining judge that, for all her talk about expensive seaside resorts, Violette had never been away from Paris.

Perhaps, then, Chabrol's avoidance—disconcerting as it may be—of a traditionally well made form comes both to reflect the pettiness of the world in which Violette outwardly lives and to adumbrate an inner world which asserts itself in irrational impulses, like the extraordinary moment (worthy of Buñuel) when immediately after seeing her parents collapse from the poison, Violette voraciously hacks herself a slice of meat from the family's supper roast, impulses whose unknowability goes deeper than any legalistic unravelling.

And this mysteriousness seems finally to fuse with the film's contemplation of a vanished past, its

evocation of the 30s in terms of the exotic ephemera—jazz bands, cocktails—which at once represent for the conservative establishment of the time the harbingers of a corrupt future, for Violette an escape into modernity, and for us, the present-day audience, a comforting retreat into nostalgia. The movie's world is ornate but almost disembodied: apart from a political argument overheard in a bar near the beginning, the only occasion on which world affairs are allowed to insinuate themselves into the action comes in a radio broadcast which—irony redoubled—invokes Hitler merely in terms of a grotesque announcement that a Bureau of German Fashion is to be established under Frau Goebbels. Later on, as Violette is taken from jail to stand trial, the sequence is accompanied by the efforts of a street singer glimpsed outside the prison, who offers a ballad about her depredations which glazes our perception of their reality by seeming to be redolent as much of four hundred as of forty years ago (as, indeed, does the hideous prescription for public execution which we hear shortly afterwards).

In the movie's closing moments, after an unmoved Violette has told her cell-mate that she is confident of never going to the guillotine, the camera closes in on her enigmatic half-smile as a voice-over retells the remaining facts: commutation of sentence, release in 1945, a marriage to the son of a prison official which produced five children, a pardon in 1963, shortly before her death. As the close-up of Violette fades to black (there is no end title) a kind of transference seems to be achieved: we shall never be able to understand the past which formed her, yet she can comprehend the compromises that lie ahead.

TIM PULLEINE

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith

In Tasmania they used to run Aborigines off the cliffs. In New South Wales they herded them together and shot them like rabbits. It is only fairly recently that the facts of this genocide have impinged on the Australian consciousness; the much vaunted new Australian cinema, trading on nostalgia for a history made by whites, has barely scratched the surface. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (Fox) is the first major Australian feature to treat the 'problem' of the Aborigine as more than exotic cultural baggage. Nominally, it is about a spontaneous act of violence, the murder of whites by a half-blood Aborigine. But its true centre is the slow destruction of a race.

The story, adapted by director Fred Schepisi from Thomas Keneally's novel, derives from fact. In 1900, when the Australian states were about to unite in federation, an Aborigine went on the rampage in the farmlands of New South Wales, murdering seven whites and eluding capture for months before he was finally tracked down and hanged. Jimmie Blacksmith (Tommy Lewis) is a mission black, a half-caste reared by a Methodist minister and his wife. He is educated in the ways of the whites, and accepts the values they have imposed on him. He wants a job, money, a piece of property. Jimmie Blacksmith's tragedy is to be caught between two worlds. In a prologue, Schepisi has indicated (signposted rather—not for the only time in the film the antitheses are telegraphed) the aboriginal heritage which Jimmie will never be able to slough off. A tribal initiation ritual has more call on Jimmie than his place in a Christian choir; later he will be told by a white man that there is too much Christian in him. But for Jimmie's white mentors, his only salvation is to be assimilated into the culture of the new Australians.

So Jimmie tries. He gets work as an itinerant farm labourer, making picket fences for the new settlers. He is anxious to please, works hard and well, obsequiously tolerates the veiled abuse. He is embarrassed to be joined by his brother Mort (Freddy Reynolds), a full Aborigine with an easy-going manner and a habit of bursting into laughter.

Schepisi takes some time to establish Jimmie's character and the conflict of wills within him. The squalid degradation of the aboriginal settlements, where men 'lend' their wives for the white man's secret pleasure, is juxtaposed with Jimmie's education in the real ways of the world he aspires to. He is systematically cheated by his employers. His swearing, a self-conscious token of his worldliness, earns him a rebuke for trespassing on prohibited territory. He joins the police as a stable hand and tracker, and is told by his superior Farrell (Ray Barrett) that Federation will make no difference to 'black bastards' like him: 'You'll still have the same rights—none.' Jimmie is bemused, having picked up the notion that Federation is a good thing.

The contradictions accumulate, signalled in Schepisi's script with perhaps too close an eye on the balance of the narrative. (The several close-ups of butchered meat, shorthand premonitions of the bloody violence to come, more blatantly betray a certain literalness in the script.) It is while he is with the police that Jimmie's acquiescence in the white man's determination to keep him in his place is first seriously put to the test, when he is instrumental in the arrest of an Aborigine who is sadistically assaulted by Farrell and later 'found' hanged in his cell. If anything, the experience strengthens Jimmie's will to be accepted: he marries a white woman (Angela Punch), believing her to be pregnant by him, and proudly builds them a home on the farm where he now works. But when the baby is born, white and obviously not his, the apparent tolerance of his employer's family, the Newbys, is revealed as an attempt to return Jimmie to his place outside the familial fold. The cumulative offence spills out in an act of retribution, as Jimmie takes an axe to the Newby women.

The violence is sudden and shocking, but properly placed by Schepisi's evident concern for structural detail. Jimmie's explanation to his stunned brother—'I declared war'—echoes an earlier scene in which he has heard the phrase used by whites in a conversation about the Boer War. But the film denies any interpretation of Jimmie's act as instinctive or culturally sanctioned. When Mort later wounds a woman who levels a gun at him, he apologises to her, and he is horrified when Jimmie cold-bloodedly shoots a woman and her child. Jimmie is beyond redemption, having tried and failed to cross an impossible boundary. It is Mort, less caught between cultures, who helps the asthmatic schoolteacher taken by the brothers as a hostage, and it is Mort who abandons the veneer of 'civilisation' and accepts the fate enjoined by his tribal knowledge. In the last of the film's too frequent ironies, Jimmie is caught when he takes refuge in a convent.

A flock of birds soars behind the final credits, an aboriginal totem which was evidently accidentally contrived. And, inevitably perhaps, it is when it deals directly with its aboriginal subtext that the film is least sure of itself. The Panavision vistas of the second half, when the brothers are on the run in the mountains and the rain forests, are punctuated by aboriginal icons and close-ups of plants and animals which self-consciously announce their point about the Aborigine's communion with the earth (*Walkabout* did this just as self-consciously, but integrally). These sequences betray the slight unsteadiness of narrative structure which was evident also in Schepisi's first feature, *The Devil's Playground*. But they don't seriously undermine the film. *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* is a big film intended for a big audience. On its own terms, it is a powerful indictment of the insidious, pervasive cancer of white racism.

DAVID WILSON

Nosferatu—The Vampyre

Given the current fashion for remakes, together with the bubbling revival of German film production, it's to be expected that the *Caligari* era, stretching gloriously from Rye's *Student of Prague* to Lang's *Testament of Dr Mabuse*, will in due time prove a fertile landscape for cinematic rediscovery. *Metropolis* could rise again, with pauses for



'The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith'

industrial inaction; Kriemhild could wreak a multi-million-dollar revenge, and there could be a punk-disco version of *Alraune*. But Murnau's *Nosferatu*, in 1922 just about at the heart of German expressionism, is unarguably a special case in that its protagonist shows every sign of remaining permanently undead. Rediscovery is unnecessary; Dracula and his acolytes continue to stalk both stage and screen in rude vitality. That Werner Herzog, an original even among a generation of originals, should choose to unleash the Count upon us yet again, suggests an exercise in futility rather than of inspiration.

In its defence, Herzog's *Nosferatu—The Vampyre* (Fox) is concerned not with Bram Stoker but with F. W. Murnau, a homage rarely enough attempted (Godard and Chabrol have paid their respects, but few besides) and never before in the context of *Nosferatu* (pace the Professor of that name in *Alphaville*). Herzog's first step has been the reincarnation of Murnau's vampire, as ineradicably portrayed by Max Schreck, in Klaus Kinski's superb make-up—the same bulging dome above the hollow, sleepless gaze and attenuated front teeth, the same obscene spray of fingernails, the same reptilian glide punctuated by bursts of superhuman energy. Scene after scene constructed around this appalling figure is simply Murnau with colour and sound: the abrupt assault on a paralysed Jonathan Harker, the unhurried voyage of the plague ship, the vampire's choking collapse by the window at sunrise. The warning shadows of the expressionists patrol once more the walls of the stricken town (formerly Bremen, now Delft in Holland), and the sepulchral cloak and hat of Caligari himself can be briefly glimpsed outside the Harker home. More subtly, Herzog is perfectly attuned to Murnau's symphony of landscapes, which Lotte Eisner has linked with the spectacular harmonies of Dovzhenko's work; echoing them both, Herzog's *Nosferatu* is a celebration of rolling hills and mists, majestic forests, and the customary turbulence of cascading rivers. When night falls amid this impervious splendour, Herzog reverently allows it to take its time—although dawn, one must admit, is by contrast startlingly brisk.

The story, of course, is another matter. Few spines will be chilled these days by the festive scene, rendered so familiar by Bray Studios, in which Harker speaks the name of Dracula at the local hostelry and the innkeeper's wife promptly drops some crockery. Herzog almost, but not quite, decides to play it for laughs, and the uncertainty flows on into later scenes so that, for instance, the Count's excessive interest in the cut on his guest's hand comes perilously close to music-hall melo-

drama in which everyone knows the script. All the conventions are observed, from the close-ups of a flying bat to the stygian coach-and-four, from the punctured neck-wounds to the spectacle of Dracula reposing in his tomb. Through Isabelle Adjani's performance, moreover, Herzog follows the choreography of high tragedy—the arms limply extended in farewell, the eyes and mouth gaping in oval horror at a nightmare, the decorous faint on the doorstep when the returned husband fails to recognise her. It's carefully, consistently and courageously mannered, but it goes unsupported by the other performances; Bruno Ganz (as Harker) has a conscientious anonymity, Jacques Dufilho admirably underplays his role as the doomed ship's captain, while Roland Topor is allowed to go way over the top as Dracula's lunatic disciple. The collision of styles provides, as so often in Herzog's films, a special kind of tension, but it creates of *Nosferatu*, unlike the Murnau, or for that matter the Terence Fisher versions, a series of cameos, some successful, some not.

It's when he strays furthest away from Murnau that Herzog is at his most interesting. The disintegration of the town as the plague takes its toll, with Lucy Harker wandering distractedly through the macabre celebrations and being invited by half the production crew to join their Last Supper, is presented with an urgency that supports Herzog's press statement about it being 'no accident that I make this film now.' (Occasionally he retreats to a rooftop, gazing speculatively down at the processions of coffins, but he quickly returns to the heart of the matter—the collapse of a smug and stifling bourgeois community, in which the sacrifice of a girl in order to destroy the plague-carrier is meaningful more as an act of loving acceptance than as the rejection of evil).

From Murnau's images, Herzog creates his own: the magnificent staging of the plague ship taking aboard its deadly cargo, and the helicopter shot of its course across a placid sea; the return of Jonathan Harker, borne by coach between two canals as if marooned in perpetuity; the macabre comedy of Van Helsing's arrest as, bloody stake in hand, he is apprehended by a reluctant citizen who doubts (with good reason) whether the due processes of law have survived; the brief, astounding glimpse, straight out of *Aguirre*, of a raft laden with coffins being swept down a torrential river. Finally, *Nosferatu* shows the plague-carrier galloping across sand-flats on his endless, lethal journey, his continuity praised by a reverential choir on the soundtrack; Herzog finds both image and concept equally glorious.

It's a conclusion that confirms the reason behind



Murnau revisited: Klaus Kinski in 'Nosferatu—The Vampyre'

the remake—the reprise is not of Murnau but of Herzog. Dracula is an outsider like Kaspar Hauser, Stroszek and Aguirre, a death-seeker amid the troops of somnambulists. Invading Holland with his conquistadorial rats, he bears a priceless gift, as promised by all true prophets—the knowledge of how *not* to die. There's just one catch: eternal life, secured through the sharing of blood, has its disadvantages. Kinski's voice conveys them superbly by its despairing weariness. 'Can you imagine,' he murmurs hopelessly, 'what it's like to endure centuries of experiencing the same futile things?' (It is, in fact, the only satisfying voice on the soundtrack, which features disconcerting splinters of fractured English and lines like 'Getting mail over the Carpathians is very difficult!') Such is the continuing fatalism of Werner Herzog, continuing to revolve in an elegant solitude.

PHILIP STRICK

suddenly realise, as Berry Berenson is preparing a meal, that Chaplin has insinuated herself into the house to stalk her. Confronting the intruder, Berenson happens to be clutching a vast knife with which she had been chopping vegetables, but the scene devolves on a visual equivalent of 'Boo!' as Chaplin suddenly whips out a matching knife, then gently indicates that neither weapon is to the point. For Chaplin has been liberated in more ways than one; and terror, along with love and marriage and death, is merely a pawn to be threatened on the way towards capturing the bigger prize of an assertion of independence. So, having undermined Berenson's belief in the sanctity of her marriage, and having disproved Perkins' transference of his affections by luring him into her bed again, Chaplin simply 'borrows' his credit cards for a spending spree and heads alone for the open highway.

If this were all, *Remember My Name* would be no more than an amusing gloss on a genre. But Rudolph also cuts much deeper into the Chaplin character (a remarkably fine performance, incidentally) by way of the marvellous Alberta Hunter blues numbers which punctuate the action and which gradually refine the definition of isolation. At the beginning of the film, scarcely aware of the people she jostles in the streets and hair-trigger in her reactions when crossed, Chaplin's withdrawal from human commerce is a natural result of her twelve years in jail. Theoretically, she then chooses to continue her marginal existence in pursuance of the satisfaction of revenge; what the film gives leave to doubt, however, is the quality of satisfaction to be had from a revenge so formalised that even its climactic speech of forgiving reproach ('I didn't cry when you disappeared; I was worried about you, but I figured you had to do your own time . . .') has not only been rehearsed to the point of meaninglessness but been tried out first for size on a bemused black janitor.

A terrible vulnerability is momentarily glimpsed in Chaplin's carapace of indifference as she breaks down and begs the janitor to hold her close, only to be mockingly revealed as just another trick when she goes through precisely the same performance with her ex-husband. And yet . . . the tone of her triumph retains the ambivalence Billie Holiday once defined when she said that 'the blues to me is like being very sad, very sick, going to church, being very happy. There's two kinds of blues.' Here, complementing each other, we get both kinds at once; and when Chaplin's happiness reaches its zenith as she drives off alone towards freedom, Alberta Hunter's sadness interweaves its admonitory note: 'makes no difference where you go/just before your final curtain/you gotta reap just

what you sow.' *Remember My Name* might, in fact, be described quite simply as a blues.

Making precisely the same use of a genre mechanism in *Halloween* (Miracle), John Carpenter turns it to equally good though ultimately self-defeating advantage. As in *Assault on Precinct 13*, he begins with an attention-grabbing subjective sequence, and the effect is stunning: the camera prowling outside a house, peering in at the teenage couple necking behind its illuminated windows, watching in silent complicity as an unseen presence selects an enormous butcher's knife, dons a grotesque Halloween mask, and commits bloody murder. At which point, as the emerging killer is revealed to be a six-year-old boy, the camera cranes sharply up and away in shocked disbelief.

Cut to fifteen years later and a slow process of attrition as the same homicidal maniac, now adult, escapes from his asylum and returns home to exorcise his demons. Rarely have the remoter corners of the Panavision frame been used to such good effect, as shifting volumes of darkness and light reveal the ineluctable presence of a sinister something. We know, and Carpenter knows we know, that it's all a game; and he delights in being just one step ahead of expectation, revealing nothing when there should be something, and something—as in the subtle reframing of the girl sobbing in the doorway when she has finally managed to kill the killer, showing the corpse suddenly sitting bolt upright behind her—long after there should by rights be nothing.

Fascinatingly, in a film devoted to the terrors of the night, Carpenter allows the mystery to be flooded by the light of reason. Despite all the talk of bogeymen by a frightened child, there is nothing of the supernatural here. His killer is simply a killer, a creature of flesh and blood who bleeds when stabbed, who can be stopped by bullets, yet who obstinately refuses to die.

The analogy here is perhaps with Norman Bates' mother in *Psycho*, given a terrible immortality by her son's mania. And in fact, playing the game with nice wit, Carpenter establishes quite a network of references (the victims are all teenagers voyeuristically observed in the sexual act; the heroine is played by Jamie Lee Curtis, daughter of Janet Leigh; Donald Pleasence's psychiatrist, a nominal hero unable to avert the disaster, is named after the John Gavin character), allowing him to refer to Mrs. Bates' involuntary masquerade for two of the best scenes in the film. One is the chilling celebration of a love enduring beyond the grave when one murdered girl is found formally laid out on her bed with, at her head, the tombstone of the killer's first victim. The other, the hallucinating moment when the door opens, on her lover as the girl thinks, but in fact on the killer demurely gowned from head to foot in a white shroud.

The trouble with the film, ultimately, is that unlike *Assault on Precinct 13*, which was constantly turning aside to explore intriguing byways of character, it traces its genre geometrics too slavishly. Simply obeying their pre-ordained roles as monster or victim, resourceful heroine or ineffectual hero, the characters here do tend to let the temperature drop between bouts of dazzling *mise en scène*.

TOM MILNE

Remember My Name and Halloween

Thirty years ago, as played by Joan Crawford or Barbara Stanwyck, the vengeful jailbird wife in *Remember My Name* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) would have been observed in full flight. Released after serving twelve years of a murder rap for which she was left to take the blame, she would have homed monomaniacally in on her prey—the ex-husband who held his counsel during the trial—for a finale ending either in bullets or the torture of falling in love again.

Alan Rudolph plays the game beautifully, up to a point, as the said lady (Geraldine Chaplin) purposefully decks herself out with a new set of clothes, coolly browbeats the supermarket manager who is to employ her and the janitor of the halfway-house where she is to stay, and then drives fleetingly through the building site where her ex-husband (Anthony Perkins) works, honking her horn to ensure that the image he caught out of the corner of his eye has a suitably haunting tang of half-recognition. Already, however, one senses that her wings have been clipped; and far from carrying a minatory charge, her sinister prowlings as she begins to make her presence felt by mysterious telephone calls, by vandalising her victim's garden, by hurling a rock through the window as he makes love to his new wife (Berry Berenson), have a certain irresistible comicality.

As much as anything, it is her own sense of the absurdity that undercuts her campaign of terror. There is a classic scene, for instance, in which we

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

In Don Siegel's 1955 version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the director chose to show the intriguing, faintly humorous process by which human 'copies' actually emerged from their extraterrestrial 'pods', those creations of the special effects department which subsequently fixed his film in the popular imagination. The film registered with greater effect, as a science-fiction thriller at least, when it conjured up purely abstract spectres of menace. At the beginning of the film, for instance, when Miles Bennell (Kevin McCarthy), the doctor in the small Californian community of Santa Mira, pays a house call on the benevolent Ira, whose niece Wilma is worried since finding the

old man not quite 'himself', the fate that is to befall the town (and, if Siegel had had his way, the world) is essentially suggested—though the scene has other carefully orchestrated parts—by a single shot of Ira in the middle distance placidly mowing his lawn.

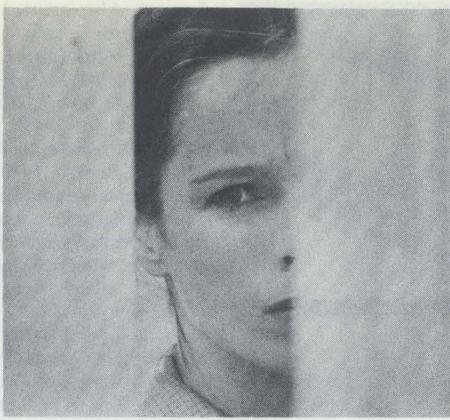
In the new, updated version of the film, released by United Artists and adapted from Siegel's film and Jack Finney's original serial novel by scriptwriter W. D. Richter and director Philip Kaufman, the abstract aspects of the plot, though still present, have been firmed up by hints at a pseudo-scientific 'explanation' and a stronger roster of principals than in the earlier film. Miles, a divorced man but still very much an innocent, has been replaced by Matthew Bennell (Donald Sutherland), a scrupulous and enthusiastic Department of Health inspector (he reveals his character in an early scene by going into raptures over the discovery of a rat dropping in the kitchen of a fancy French restaurant). In the original, Miles' insipid friend Becky (Dana Wynter) knew nothing about medicine or science and could only tag along as the rather burdensome love interest; in the remake, however, it is Matthew's colleague Elizabeth Driscoll, played with an agreeable mixture of competence and zaniness by Brooke Adams, who finally fathoms how the pods are killing and replicating the already 'alienated' inhabitants of San Francisco.

Although it is not decked out with the expensive hardware and effects of some recent Hollywood science-fiction movies, the new *Body Snatchers* does attempt to enhance its credibility (albeit half-heartedly) by an early suggestion that the pods are related to that real organism the grex, a single-celled creature which subdivides and then, in Richter's words, 'schemes' to survive. 'One cell begins to function as an arm, another as a feeding apparatus, another as a tiny heart.' We are meant to hear, perhaps, an echo of that money-minting catchphrase 'We are not alone'.

Thanks in large part to the spirited playing of the principals, this updating and relocation works well enough up to a point. By the end of the film, Elizabeth and Matthew and his friends Jack and Nancy Bellicec (Jeff Goldblum and Veronica Cartwright), the owner-operators of a mud-bathhouse, have effectively established themselves as individuals who, we hope, will not be subsumed by the pods. In Siegel's film, on the other hand, the principals were so bland and the pods so insidiously, effortlessly effective, that it was not for the human characters we feared so much as for ourselves. This feeling was heightened for American audiences in particular by the film's political subtext (wholly absent in the remake): that the witch-hunting forces of the Right would, if we allowed ourselves 'to fall asleep', assume control of our minds and bodies as irrevocably as the pods.

The new *Body Snatchers* is notable in the main for its cherishing parts: the moment when Elizabeth and her boyfriend Geoffrey fall to dallying on the bed and he lets out a whoop on hearing a sporting result through the headphones he has neglected to remove; or sustained plot threads such as the development of the relationship between Elizabeth and Matthew which blossoms, after Geoffrey turns into a pile of grey fluff and is carried away by his pod replica, from professional respect to a rather touching and understated personal affection. Furthermore, Kaufman's springy direction and Michael Chapman's vivid photography (so different in effect from Ellsworth Fredricks' ominous expanse of SuperScope grey) go some way towards making the parts cohere and a long way towards establishing the film as a genuinely bona fide popular movie.

At the same time, however, Kaufman's *Body Snatchers* is very much a remake aimed at buffs familiar with the original in particular and film lore in general: when a silver-haired man jumps on to the bonnet of Matthew's car with cries of 'They're here' (he subsequently rushes off to be killed, presumably, by another car), heads will wag in recognition of Kevin McCarthy reprising his own actions in the highway scene at the end of the original. (Enthusiasts of this form of I-Spy may



'Remember My Name': Geraldine Chaplin

check their memories against the references listed by Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker*, 25 December 1978.) The film is in some ways a family joke: a horror story that isn't really meant to terrify, but rather to send a consciously enjoyable frisson down the spectator's spine. It is a science-fiction movie which, like several other recent examples from this broad genre, from *Demon Seed* to *The Fury*, delights not so much in ideas as in the ghosts of ideas (in this case, for example, little is made of the distinction between 'them' and 'us'); indeed at the beginning of the film everyone in San Francisco seems a little unnatural). At the end of Siegel's *Body Snatchers*, Miles returns to the cave where he has left the sleepy Becky, and in a single shock close-up we know that she is not 'herself'. At the end of Kaufman's Matthew embraces Elizabeth's corpse which disintegrates in his arms, and is then pursued through the burning pod nursery by the woman's naked, expressionless simulacrum. Siegel was anxious to finish working out his plot; Kaufman, from time to time, merely to underline his effects.

JOHN PYM

Blue Remembered Hills

Looking back, childhood is always seen through a distorting mirror, and usually through a glass darkly. Even the most idyllic of recollections—of Carroll and Barrie—are tinged with rather more than regret. The innocence of Alice is ambivalent. Less ambivalently, that the children are awful is a theme commonplace in literature about childhood, from Cocteau to *Lord of the Flies*. Golding's novel, and the film made from it, suggested an innocence corrupted by circumstance. But the story is an adult morality: the evil is not so much of the children as bequeathed to them by the despair of the world they were born into. To suggest that children are born evil, progenitors of their adult selves, is an altogether more adventurous conceit.

But how do you suggest this, without foisting on children an adult's selective hindsight? *Bugsy Malone* had children playing adults, an amusing notion but one whose resonance, once the topsy-turvy logic was assimilated, was largely one-dimensional. Dennis Potter, in his television play *Blue Remembered Hills* (BBC TV; directed with

'Blue Remembered Hills': Janine Duvitski and Helen Mirren



unobtrusive assurance by Brian Gibson), has inverted this device: his children are played by adults, dressed, talking and behaving like children and presumably drawing on their own memories of childhood to flesh out the author's invention of their masquerade. To watch adults playing children is immediately disconcerting; doubly so when the 'children', far from radiating innocence, are seen to possess all the behavioural apparatus of adults. If the view is distorted, it is also seen through a two-way mirror.

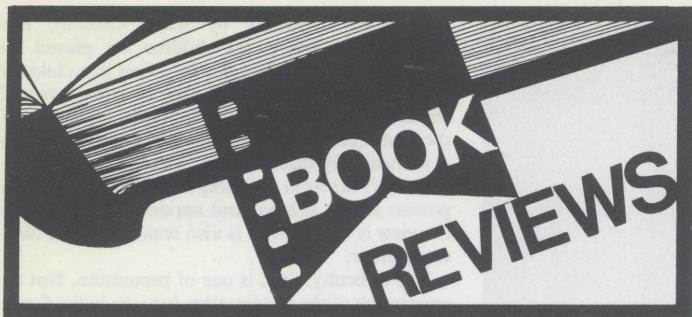
The difficulty, first, is one of persuasion. Not by any stretch of the imagination does the bulky figure of Colin Welland in outsize shorts suggest a snotty-nosed boy, even when he picks his nose. Yet astonishingly (or perhaps not, for Freudians), after some initial qualms the mind soon swallows the image's lie. And in a play which is always faintly unsettling, one sequence—in which adults are playing children playing adults—is the stuff that dreams are made of. Potter's children are from his own past, the Forest of Dean in wartime. The only material reminder of the war, outside of the children's fantasies, is a prisoner of war camp, an unseen threat beyond the fields and the woods which are the boundaries of their world. Beyond these boundaries is the unknown, an undiscovered country of the mind which can transform an escaped prisoner into a bogeyman.

The escaped prisoner is a rumour, heralded by a siren. He is never seen, but his menace acts as a dramatic device to pull into focus the rather amorphous impressions of children killing time on a summer's day in the woods. Potter's shifting emphases during this sequence persuasively articulate the fickle moods of the childhood mind. The children spontaneously enact a fantasy of being hunted (haunted) by this ready-made bogeyman until reality breaks in and one of the girls starts crying. Two of the boys, made of bolder stuff, maliciously startle the others as they huddle together in a ditch; and from the general panic evolves some kind of plan for meeting the threat head-on.

Make-believe, a frequent visitor in Potter's television plays, is here a permanent resident, creating fear for the children and sustaining them through their self-made frights. It is casual and unrehearsed, from the fat boy's (Colin Welland) imitation of a plane to the two girls (Helen Mirren and Janine Duvitski) playing 'parents' as they push a dilapidated pram. But it can also be dangerous and even deadly: the play's climax has a boy, cut off from the rest in his own retarded fantasy world, playing with fire in a barn and burnt to death when the others shut the door on him. The shock would be too great for the play to sustain were it not for Potter's implication that the malice of children can be weighed equally with their harmless fantasies.

Potter's title is taken from Housman, the same lines ('What are those blue remembered hills...? That is the land of lost content... The happy highways where I went/And cannot come again') which provided an epigraph to another story of not so innocent children, *Walkabout*. But there is in the play no feel of regret for a paradise lost. In more than one sense, Potter's children are children writ large: the actors, larger than life, conjure a collective remembrance, dredging their own memories but also provoking an uneasy recall. Boys torment and kill a squirrel, and there is an awful moment when the unmotivated violence of the act leaves them momentarily bemused about what they can do next. The hierarchy of the group, the tall stories (the RAF, says the fat boy, is dropping dirty apples over Germany to poison the population), the fat boy's taunts and ready submission when challenged, the swear words flaunted as a badge of knowingness, the aimless boasting, the small thrill to be had from pretending to be squeamish about blood—it all has a familiarity more authentic than the memory-joggers (comics, money for returned jam jars) dropped into the script. And if these are accurate memories, their enactment by adults uncomfortably confirms Potter's dark reflections on the capacity of children to be really nasty even when they are only pretending.

DAVID WILSON



BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN GRIERSON:
A Documentary Biography
By Forsyth Hardy
FABER AND FABER, £7.95

This is a tough book to review by one who knew its subject well for almost fifty years and its author nearly as long; also because I have covered much of the ground on the British, but not the Canadian, side myself and am still in process of so doing. Forsyth Hardy's is a solid, maybe dour book, when I feel that, like its subject, it could have been more dynamic. It is not so much a profile of a most remarkable and influential man, who gained international repute in fields far wider than the medium in which he worked, but a record. That in itself is most welcome and valuable and important. So much was written about Grierson at the time of his death that it is superfluous to add more. We all know his many virtues. He had some less pleasing sides (as I well know), but who hasn't? He was an excellent, adroit actor and at times an enticing showman. These are aspects that Hardy does not bring out.

In that last year or two, when he and I would meet at The Bear in Devizes to discuss my book, afterwards he would insist on buying a bottle of brandy for me to take home to my wife. The silver hip flask he gave me when I left for New York in September 1937, I still have after its four years on the Atlantic floor with Eric Knight's body. Those are personal things to remember.

Many quotations from Grierson, some fresh from the files he left with his wife, Margaret, are given by Hardy, but none perhaps more revealing and penetrating than these two: 'I have been a propagandist all my working life because I have believed that we needed to do our democratic mind over if we were going to save democracy. I have believed that in education was the heart of the matter, but that education needed to be revolutionised altogether if it was to become the instrument of revolutionised democracy I was thinking of... I have had to pretend to a whole lot of powers I didn't have in running my education revolution. I have had to be a creative worker and a civil servant and a promoter and an organiser and a critic and a teacher of the youth; and although I hate finance and know nothing about it, I have had to find the millions, often from people I dared not tell fully what I was after lest it would seem pretentious' (an unpublished MS). And again worth repeating, in Hardy's paraphrase: 'The curse of all

creative services within governments had been too close a responsibility to Treasury sanction in the method of expenditure and in the matter of employment of personnel.' This was on the file in Ottawa at the National Film Board of Canada and was a kind of 'time bomb'.

I should like to see these words, and many of Grierson's, printed and made essential reading for every Minister, MP, the Establishment at the BBC and ITV oligarchies in this country, and for the heads of all nationalised and public service bodies, all those who doubtless will never hear of this book, who have probably never heard of Grierson, let alone are aware of the documentary approach to life.

The years of the GPO Film Unit I find Hardy deals with rather flimsily, but his coverage of Grierson's massive achievements during the war years in Canada is thorough and I am sure most accurate. I am not qualified to judge the detail, having only met many members past and present of the National Film Board and read the privately mimeographed History by Marjorie McKay.

Inevitably there are several points on which I, the 'historian of the documentary movement' as Grierson himself once generously called me, find myself either in disagreement with Hardy, or else suggest omissions from what is in general a careful and hard-worked record. There was, for example, far more to the MOI-COI story than what is sketchily given on p. 166. The setting-up in 1949 of the British Documentary Group as a body with which to negotiate with the World Union of Documentary was initiated at a meeting in Brussels in 1947 and not, as Hardy states, in Marianski Lazne a year later. The evil dissolution of the Crown Film Unit in 1952 had deeper issues at stake than he implies (p. 179). The whole murky period of Group 3 is, in my opinion, glided over too glibly, with Hardy too lenient in spotting its weaknesses, for which not only Grierson was responsible—so also were Balcon and Lawrie.

He is not fully informed about Grierson being given a Doctorate at Glasgow University in 1948 (which Grierson wanted more than some tatty recognition by the British Government); it was to me that Grierson came knowing of my good friendship with Sir John Boyd Orr, the Chancellor, because of *World of Plenty*, asking me to approach Orr on his behalf, which I gladly did. The dominant part played by Robert Fraser (now Sir Robert) as Director of the COI in the deliberate post-war decline of British documentary is

ignored. Also omitted is how Jack Beddington came to succeed Kenneth Clark (now Lord Clark) as Director of the MOI Films Division, and indeed how Clark himself was appointed in 1940. (See Garson Kanin's *Remembering Mr Maugham*, Bantam Books, 1970, p. 179). A great deal more could have been said about Grierson's visits to London during the war years when the young people, to whom he was only a name and a myth, were to be so disappointed.

It is good that Hardy had access to Mrs. Frances Strauss' records (now in the University of Texas); I met her in New York in 1938 and heard a lot from her which I do not intend to repeat. Good, too, that Grierson's involvement with jazz in the mid-20s is revealed; he brought some 78s back with him which later he gave to me and I had them transferred to LPs, wonderful numbers by Ruth Etting and Lee Morse. Some minor errors: *The Children's Story* was directed by Shaw, not Wright; Prof. Charles E. Merriam, whose book *American Political Ideas: 1865-1917* had a more profound influence on Grierson than Hardy allows (and on me, for Grierson gave me his copy), is misspelt. The order of those of us who joined the EMB Film Unit in 1931 is incorrect: it is accurate in my *Documentary Diary*. Grierson had nothing to do with the setting up of *The Times* film (see *Documentary Diary*, pp. 241-266); Grierson never met Stafford Cripps; I was the contact. The famous Battle of Documentary Films for the New York World's Fair 1938 was neither initiated by nor fought by Grierson alone (see *Documentary Diary*, pp. 233-240). The founder members of Film Centre are wrongly named. The Films of Scotland series was made after Grierson had left the GPO Film Unit. And nothing at all is said about the pilfering of the ARFP Benevolent Fund to help save *World Film News*, which it didn't!

Of the 51 illustrations, 11 at least are all too familiar from elsewhere. I still doubt if the photograph of Grierson with a beard shooting *Drifters* is authentic; it is more likely at the time of *Granton Trawler*. And I fail to understand how a picture of Edgar Anstey presenting an Hon. Membership from ACTT to Charlie Chaplin has any relevance to a Grierson biography. Why not have included that historic photograph of the many distinguished documentary people from many countries taken at the Tribute to Flaherty in either Leipzig or Oberhausen? The thumbnail cartoons are a waste of time. The back jacket photograph of *Drifters* in the making has been used so often that it should now be laid to rest in peace.

But for all my small cavils, it is a book that had to be done and Hardy has, for the time being, done it well. One last point and I am done: in view of Grierson's deep concern with internationalism it is odd that *The World is Rich* is given only two fleeting mentions, *World Without End* one and *World of Plenty* none at all. They were not his films, true, but they fitted into his whole world pattern.

PAUL ROTH

ALAIN RESNAIS:
The Role of Imagination
By James Monaco

SECKER AND WARBURG, £4.95

In his preface to this study of Resnais, noting that 'there is no way that any book about a film artist can give a perfect image of his oeuvre', James Monaco offers the sensible caveat that what we are about to receive 'is—very precisely—James Monaco's Alain Resnais'. Ironically enough as things turn out, however, a personal view is precisely what we do not get.

Cleverly demolishing a received opinion or two, most notably Pauline Kael's shrill pseudo-populist squawk that 'Resnais' movies come out of an intolerable mixture of technique and culture' (what else would one expect any film to come out of?), Monaco then equally cleverly pulls the films themselves apart to see what makes them tick. The result is a good deal of valuable insight into the tensions arising from Resnais' diversified collaborations with his writers, and about the ways in which these tensions sometimes led to areas of misinterpretation (with audiences, for instance, reading *Hiroshima mon Amour* as primarily a love story). Having achieved this dissection, however, Monaco seems faintly at a loss how to put the pieces together again, unsure even that it is necessary to try.

It is all very well, for example, to break *Je t'aime, je t'aime* down into its component parts, tabulating the number of times each fragment from the past is revisited in order to establish its relative importance to Claude Ridder, and to enthuse about the mastery of this 'editor's film par excellence'; but since the film's 'irresistible' exuberance, charm and humour are also stressed, a word or two in graphic illumination of these qualities would not have come amiss. Oddly enough, in fact, although at pains to argue against the popular image of Resnais as an aloofly intellectual director, Monaco seems unable or unwilling to explain the ways in which he instils emotion into his work. Here, for instance, the famous shot of the mouse reaching its paws up to the air hole at the end of *Je t'aime, je t'aime* is mentioned, but only in a caption to an illustration which notes Jacques Sternberg's remark in the script that the mouse 'looks in good health; it's enjoyed its trip'. Yet the image is surely ambivalent; and the mouse, imprisoned under its plastic dome, is also a heart-rending intimation of the fate of Claude Ridder, condemned to eternal incarceration in a vicious circle of his desolating memories.

Part of the problem with the book is that Monaco sets up a number of straw dummies which lead him into fearful tangents as he attempts to demolish them. He argues for instance against the notion of Resnais as a 'difficult' director, yet his exploration uncovers whole reefs of ambiguity ready to snag the unwary (the commendable idea is to rescue Resnais; but is there any reason why, just because his films are funny and charming, they shouldn't also be 'difficult' in their tortuous com-

plexities?). He also argues against the notion of Resnais as 'a theorist of time and memory', drifting through some vague semantic distinctions in order to substitute the term 'imagination', which Resnais himself prefers but which does not alter the fact (as Monaco recognises) that the films are indeed haunted by time and memory.

Perhaps some of these straw dummies are less insubstantial in the American context which is Monaco's prime concern, but there is nevertheless a dismaying aura of classroom hypothesis about the book's basic text: 'What we distrust about Resnais's films is their "emotional coldness".' Certainly Monaco has no such distrust, and I imagine a good many other critics and admirers would join me in asking to be included out of his generalisation. The best section of the book, perhaps because it has no windmills to tilt at, is the one devoted to unfilmed projects. Included are fascinating and absolutely lucid accounts of *Délivre nous du bien* (about the Marquis de Sade) and *The Monster Maker*, a science fiction epic in which urban garbage engagingly turns out to be the menace.

TOM MILNE

HITCH

By John Russell Taylor
FABER AND FABER, £6.50

The critical biography must generally be one of the most thankless, frustrating forms. No one supposes that it is sufficient to learn about the artist in order to understand his art; nor that there is much point in taking apart the latter simply to find out some secrets about the former. And in the case of Alfred Hitchcock, whatever the temptations to pick at the image and hypothesise about how and why he does what he does to his audiences, the frustrations and contradictions go on multiplying as in a mirror maze. If the life of this intensely private Englishman, of complete bourgeois rectitude, seems to be so lacking in explanatory detail for why he should devote himself to producing unease in others, could this in itself be the explanation (why he methodically plans and executes his films so as to avoid the unexpected; why he delights in exercising control over his audience)?

John Russell Taylor's *Hitch* cheerfully acknowledges the contradictions. At the beginning: 'Two facts are obvious: everybody knows Alfred Hitchcock, and nobody knows him.' At the end: 'Alfred Hitchcock has devoted more than fifty years of his life to becoming a film, the artist disappearing into his art.' But such an admission lends all the artful surmising in between a curiously self-consuming air, with any supposition dismissed as irrelevant almost as soon as it is proposed. It hardly matters if some unhappy real-life experience with a chilly blonde (for which, of course, there is no evidence) is at the back of the humiliations Hitchcock has piled on such heroines in his films, nor if the famous story of his being locked up as a small child in a police cell is actually true—it so perfectly accounts for everything yet explains

nothing that even Hitchcock (who is, it seems, supremely uninterested in delving into his own psychology) trots it out like a calling card.

In scrutinising a blameless, uncommonly uneventful life for the explanation of an extraordinary body of work, Taylor is of course led away from what he would admit is the only legitimate object of study: the films themselves. This is a scrupulously compiled chronology and chronicle of every film Hitchcock has made, fascinating as circumstantial evidence—the story, for instance, of how 'Tippi' Hedren was poured into the Grace Kelly mould, or of Hitchcock's chequered relations with David Selznick—but scarcely analysing the films from any angle. (Taylor nervously makes reference to French critics' fondness for finding Catholic influences, but himself seems to favour, *faut de mieux*, the reliable 'transference of guilt'.) Given the shortage of personal anecdote from the many friends and colleagues who were presumably interviewed, there is also little new that can be said about the director's working methods. Considering the awkward subject it is tackling—the private life of a man who has almost wilfully suppressed that area in favour of his work—*Hitch* is a bravely entertaining, fluently written but finally self-defeating book: a well-built mousetrap set down in the wrong place.

RICHARD COMBS

JAPANESE FILM DIRECTORS

By Audie Bock
KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL, \$14.95

It is a truism, unfortunately, that apart from the work of the Big Four—Ozu, Mizoguchi, Kurosawa, Ichikawa—there is still great ignorance in the West of the score or so other major directors who have inhabited the Japanese cinema over the last sixty years. Anything which throws light on these elusive figures is welcome, and Miss Bock's book is most useful when providing background information on the careers and working methods of her chosen artists (the big four, plus Naruse, Kinoshita, Kobayashi, Imamura, Oshima and Shinoda), many of whom she has interviewed. Each is given a long chapter comprising biography, critical comment, filmography complete with miniature synopses and, most usefully, an indication as to which films are extant. One of the main problems facing any Japanese film historian is the extraordinarily prolific outputs of many veteran directors, much of which is lost today.

Although some of the biographical detail can also be found in the Anderson/Richie books, Miss Bock has uncovered a good deal of information on working methods. She contrasts the toughness of Mizoguchi, who was constantly berating his writers, and Ozu's meticulous script preparations and painstaking rehearsals, with Naruse's general willingness to comply with studio demands (which may have found an echo in the tone of 'acceptance' visible in the beautiful films themselves), and Ichikawa's

busy eclecticism and air of being able to force everything through. On questions of style she seems less reliable. She underplays, for instance, the importance of Ozu's editing methods, and it is difficult to agree with her criticism that Kurosawa's handling of 'Scope is somehow awkward and misapplied.

Miss Bock works in much useful information on Japanese social and political history in her short sections on individual films (Kobayashi's *Hara-kiri* and *Kaseki* are notably well covered). By relating the great successes of the past to the present malaise in Japanese cinema, she also shows how serious have been the inroads of television, lack of money, general timidity of producers and the gradual coarsening of taste, especially among teenagers, in the 60s and 70s. This has been a key problem for the contemporary figures dealt

with here, notably Imamura, Oshima and Shinoda. The first two found themselves opposing what they felt to be the 'conservative' values upheld by Ozu, Mizoguchi and their generation, and there are some useful comments by the directors themselves on what their intended political alternatives are. Shinoda's output has been very badly represented in the West, and Miss Bock comes full circle in her description of how his admiration for Ozu and Mizoguchi (acquired after recent research and re-examination) is synthesised in a recent film, *Banished Orin*.

Despite reservations on some of the critical opinions and a certain inelegance in the prose style, a useful book triumphantly achieves what must have been its primary concern. It leaves the reader with a determination to see more of the films.

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Documentary and Dennis Potter

SIR,—I hope that Brian Winston watched Dennis Potter's TV play *Blue Remembered Hills*. In the stimulating paper which you publish in the Winter issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND* Mr Winston conducts a thorough re-examination of documentary and finds that ailing but obstinately surviving poor relation of the film family not only continuing poorly but dishonest into the bargain, pretentious beyond its station and claiming a position in a hierarchy of its own making built on sand which he probes to find both shifting and shifty. Now, thank goodness, after fifty years, Dennis Potter may perhaps have succeeded in putting us documentary practitioners out of our shabby and guilty misery. We believed we knew what we were trying to do, but most of us never thought it a first requirement that we comply with the theoretical definitions. Purpose came first. Because of the word documentary's often limiting and always imprecise associations with 'actuality', Tony Garnett has even found it wise to

deny that what he makes are documentaries at all!

Now Dennis Potter has come to the rescue with creative interpretations of actuality so creative that he is most unlikely to be charged with documentary heresy. He has followed *Pennies from Heaven*, his scholarly analysis of a society song-sentimentalised into vice, with what seems to me to be a serious and indeed profound account of the nature of the psychological links between childhood and adult behaviour in which no child ever appears, but a number of distinguished actors and actresses dressed as children act the part more convincingly than children ever could. What price actuality now? Documentary is dead! Long live documentary!

Perhaps it may be that however indispensable a structured honeycomb of genres may be to today's theorists, for film-makers two are enough—good films and bad films?

Yours faithfully,
EDGAR ANSTEY
London, N.W. 11.

Television at Edinburgh

SIR,—Boring though it may seem I must point out that Jerry Kuehl, in his article on the Edinburgh TV Festival (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1978/79) misrepresents what happened. I cannot speak for the BBC, but LWT's *Look Here* deliberately did not record sync sound for transmission during the one Festival plenary at which its camera crew was present. Our programme simply used the Festival as a background to a TV

discussion of some of the issues that were raised at the event. Nevertheless, we did obtain the consent of the advisory committee, of which Kuehl and I were both members, to film general views of a plenary session before we even started planning the programme.

However, I believe Kuehl's principle is wrong, too: programme makers (almost above all others) should not be shy of public scrutiny by TV. It is, after all, what they do all the time to other people. Events like Edinburgh should not merely be open to the cameras; they should positively welcome them.

Yours faithfully,
ROD ALLEN
Producer *Look Here*, LWT.

BFI Production Board

SIR,—If anything is an example of the dead hand of 'British film culture' it is not the BFI Production Board but Nigel Andrews' article on it (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1978/79). His argument is that a dreary left-wing orthodoxy is being imposed through the selection procedure. Inadequate research has landed him with a fantasy version of how and why the Board selects perhaps half a dozen projects from 120 each year, knowing that all the rejected scripts, however exciting, have virtually no hope of finding funds elsewhere. The vetting process that Andrews perceives is neither programmatic nor desirable: it is made necessary simply by a chronic, criminal lack of funds.

Andrews' allegations about the Board are based on the evidence of 'both the films they support and the policy declarations they issue'. But this argument can be supported only by ignoring policy declarations (whatever he is referring to by this) and judging the films by the most conservative criteria available. *In the Forest*, *Baal* and *Rapunzel* are all condemned because they do not display the cardinal virtues of *homogeneity* (i.e. following the same line from beginning to end; keeping image tied to sound so that they do not produce contradictions), *message* (a little homily about mankind that can be summarised in a reviewer's clever sentence), and *completeness* (i.e. no loose ends should be left to worry the spectator; the fictional world should be complete and perfect). This is nothing other than the critical orthodoxy of 'British film culture'; here again we witness it castigating films which seek to explore new forms.

As Victor Perkins put it: 'The theory offers nothing more than a technical dogma in which the demands of the medium [creative vitality' in Andrews' terms] are upheld at the expense of its possibilities... As a result it tends always to value rhetoric and bombast at the expense of subtlety' (*Film as Film*, pp. 25-6). Sure enough, Andrews picks as 'a counterbalance to the preponderance of politically programmatic works favoured by the Board' the one film that is the most traditional: *A Walk Through H*. This film is Ealing whimsy rejuvenated with an injection of narrative tricks first developed in the so-called

'deconstructive' cinema which Andrews' archaic critical presuppositions render him incapable of appreciating.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN ELLIS
University of Kent.

SIR,—That Nigel Andrews can unproblematically use phrases like 'personal untrammelled work' or 'a continuous, evolving flow of creativity that spontaneously forms its own history and traditions' suggests that film theory and independent film production, distribution and exhibition practice over the past ten years has somehow eluded his attention. His lack of appreciation of the objectives and potential audiences for the films discussed in his article would certainly suggest this.

That *SIGHT AND SOUND* should lend its weight to an article which in its introductory section is little more than an unargued smear campaign on the Production Board supported by vaguely formulated but all too familiar rightist aesthetics must be depressing in the extreme for those film workers currently struggling against virtually insuperable economic difficulties to build a new British cinema.

In case readers take the article and therefore the judgments on individual films too seriously, may I conclude by quoting from Martyn Auty's review of *In the Forest* (*Monthly Film Bulletin*, January 1979): 'No British film before *In the Forest* has made so bold with history, nor had the boldness to engage with the debate on popular history. Only recent French work on this subject can be cited in comparison. For the moment, and for the movement, the film is unique.'

Yours faithfully,
ALAN FOUNTAIN
Nottingham.

SIR,—Together with many other people and groups of film-makers we saw it as essential to respond in some way to Nigel Andrews' article on Production Board films.

Given that a British Film Culture has a history already, it would seem that this would be the context in which any future development would exist. More precisely the Production Board and any films produced by it have to take account of that history as context. It seems a gross simplification to envisage a British Film Culture as caught between 'the dread context' and an 'evolving flow of creativity that spontaneously forms its own history.'

What Mr. Andrews' crude heaven and hell analysis allows him to do is prescribe which are 'good news' (have artistic merit) and which are 'bad news' (are ideologically à la mode). He indicates a prescription but does not tell us what is in it except that it should be inventive, have creative vitality and preferably lack any kind of ideological perspective. Mr. Andrews seems to be putting forward the notion that what is contained within the film's text is not as important as how much artistic merit is deployed in putting it over. He's not really bothered what the films are about as long as they are



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artistic. This seems much closer to the film school exercise mentality than the example he uses in the article.

The analysis of *In the Forest* fails to recognise a crucial element in the film's text, namely the work done on representation. He seems to accept the text as depiction of a situation or points in history handled in the 'deconstruction' mode without acknowledging what this implies—ideologically. As with the other films mentioned he merely sees it as a matter of style, good or bad. He also makes the mistaken assumption that whatever is deconstruction in mode is by definition left wing.

More generally but perhaps just as importantly it must be asked what was the purpose of Mr. Andrews' article? Was it to write off one area of cinema in preference for another? The untimely inclusion of the article can only inhibit the development of a film culture and do harm to the agencies that seek to promote it.

Yours faithfully,

J. BAGGOTT

On behalf of Independent Film Makers Association East Midlands Nottingham

SIGHT AND SOUND discussed this article with the BFI's Production Department before it was commissioned. The Production Department, in fact, itself suggested that Nigel Andrews should write the article.—Editor

Colonel Blimp

SIR,—It is not at all fair of Mr. Ian Christie (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter issue) to claim that 'the precise form of opposition' to the film of *Colonel Blimp* 'only became evident' from research done in the Public Record Office by Mr. Laurence Hayward and himself.

Their admirable work has certainly brought 'The Colonel Blimp File' under scrutiny once again. But it should not be forgotten that Dr. Paul Addison referred to that very file in his book *The Road to 1945*, which was published in 1975. On page 132, of the paperback edition of his book, Paul Addison quoted Churchill's words of September 10, 1942 on the matter, as Ian Christie now does. Thereafter Addison cited the file in his footnotes and his bibliography.

Credit where credit is due?

Yours faithfully,

TONY ALDGATE

Oxford.

Peter Finch

SIR,—I am completing a biography of Peter Finch and I am interested in any letters, photographs and information pertaining to him during his last ten years—1967 to 1977. All letters and photographs will be returned to the sender.

Yours faithfully,

ELAINE DUNDY

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London, S.W.6.



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Still taken from the frame.
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Film Guide

**AMERICAN SOLDIER, THE (Cinegate)

Cross-currents of Hollywood gangsterdom and the moral wasteland of the Munich underworld in an early Fassbinder film about a hit man operating on the borderline between loyalty and betrayal. Characteristically mannerist in style and dialogue, and foreshadowing Fassbinder's later notations on the idioms of melodrama. (Karl Scheyd, Elga Sorbas, Rainer Werner Fassbinder.) *Reviewed.*

**BIG FIX, THE (CIC)

Although his plot involves him in unnecessary complications, Jeremy Paul Kagan steers this testament to the lost revolution of the 60s clear of the shoals of bitter-sweet remembrance. Nice performance by Susan Anspach, overly fussy one by Richard Dreyfuss; incidental humour well assimilated into the increasingly dark tone. (Bonnie Bedelia.)

*BOYS FROM BRAZIL, THE (ITC)

A lavish international thriller with a neat science-fiction theme—the cloning of Adolf Hitler—retaining all the absurdity of Ira Levin's novel, both high (grandiloquent direction by Franklin Schaffner) and low (a misjudged ending). Solidly nasty impersonation of Dr. Mengele by Gregory Peck; ample ham from Laurence Olivier as old Jewish Nazi-hunter. (James Mason, Lilli Palmer.)

BRASS TARGET (CIC)

More conspiracy theory, this time bathetically dragged in to support a tottering post-WWII thriller. The amount of time spent concocting a way in which General Patton might have been assassinated is only equalled for laboriousness by the romantic complications invented for a redundant Sophia Loren. (John Cassavetes, Max Von Sydow, George Kennedy; director, John Hough.)

CALIFORNIA SUITE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Four Neil Simon playlets, very different in tone and uncomfortably cut together. Jane Fonda has the most astringent and memorable lines; Michael Caine and Maggie Smith soggily resurrect Noël Coward; Richard Pryor and Bill Cosby perform an embarrassingly black-face farce; Walter Matthau and Elaine May revive happier memories of *A New Leaf*. (Director, Herbert Ross.)

*CAPRICORN ONE (ITC)

A very promising premise—how the space administration might do a Hollywood mock-up of a Mars landing—which recalls *Westworld* and its fun with the real-life complications of movie-made fantasies. Unfortunately, after weighing in with some Watergate/Bernstein pretensions, the makers then opt for boring, Bondish derring-do. (Elliott Gould, James Brolin, Karen Black; director, Peter Hyams.)

**CHANT OF JIMMIE BLACKSMITH, THE (Fox)

Adapted from Thomas Keneally's acclaimed novel, this expansive movie (set in 1900) about a half-caste who loses faith with white society and goes on a murderous rampage through New South Wales has much to say about the byways of racism. Overstatement only occasionally intrudes. (Tommy Lewis, Freddy Reynolds, Ray Barrett; director, Fred Schepisi.) *Reviewed.*

**CHESS PLAYERS, THE (Connoisseur)

Oudh in 1856; the poet-king bows before the irresistible advance of imperialism (staunchly represented by Richard Attenborough's General Outram), while two gentlemen of Lucknow play fanatical chess. Ray's film, superbly acted and alive with humour, is a beautifully shaded study of notions about power, responsibility and decadence. (Saeed Jaffrey, Sanjeev Kumar.) *Reviewed.*

**COMES A HORSEMAN (United Artists)

Unscrupulous cattle baron determined to build his Montana empire by fair means or foul, but upstaged by the more modern villainy of the oilmen. In a film haunted by the past, Alan J. Pakula effects a strange alliance between Gothic horrors and urban paranoia to describe the final destruction of a Western tradition. (Jane Fonda, James Caan, Jason Robards.) *Reviewed.*

*DEER HUNTER, THE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Michael Cimino's epic testament to three steelworkers who unthinkingly go to war (Vietnam) and return forever changed. The film never attempts to explain Vietnam, but its one attempt to understand it through a recurring game of Russian roulette begs many questions. Nevertheless, on an immediate dramatic (and visual) level, an impressive achievement. (Robert De Niro, John Cazale, Christopher Walken.) *Reviewed.*

**EMPIRE OF PASSION (Artificial Eye)

Oshima's generally underrated companion piece to *Empire of the Senses*. Less rigidly formalised, less explicit sexually, it looks outwards rather than inwards to project the balance of forces (feudal, natural, superstitious) which oppress a pair of rural lovers. (Kazuko Yoshiyuki, Tatsuya Fuji.)

**END, THE (United Artists)

Terminally ill Burt Reynolds wants to end it all; Dom DeLuise, a lunatic, tries to help him. This West Coast black comedy veers off into the realms of slapstick, sit.com. and Brookside lunacy, but an incongruous gaiety carries the day, as director Reynolds sharpens his likeable comic persona. (Sally Field, Joanne Woodward.)

EVERY WHICH WAY BUT LOOSE (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

After two fine films (*The Outlaw Josey Wales*, *The Gauntlet*) in which he overturned his own star persona, Clint Eastwood indulges here in a much broader and curiously unenergetic send-up. The plot meanders and Eastwood's relationship with a country and western siren strikes few sparks. Comic interest devolves on Ruth Gordon and a versatile orang-utan. (Sandra Locke, Geoffrey Lewis; director, James Fargo.)

FIRST GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY, THE (United Artists)

Over-plotted (but never really getting anywhere), this period romp has Sean Connery and Donald Sutherland scheming to rob the London to Folkestone bullion train. Despite some accomplished thriller touches, writer-director Michael Crichton falls back too often on a history-book view of mid-Victorian England. (Lesley-Anne Down, Wayne Sleep.)

**GODS OF THE PLAGUE (Cinegate)

Another of Fassbinder's gangster film pastiches (made in 1969), in which characters are defined by the elaborate chiaroscuro of the decor and dialogue is minimal and monosyllabic. Permutations on the theme of betrayal, in a plot whose ramifications are only as important as the sources from which it draws and on which it comments. (Harry Baer, Hanna Schygulla, Margarethe von Trotta.)

**HALLOWEEN (Miracle)

An old-fashioned horror film which, as might be expected of the maker of

Assault on Precinct 13, strikes a perfect balance between indulging, kidding and transcending (through some virtuous camerawork) its 50s sources. Stylish, but inevitably something of a dead-ended *jeu d'esprit*. (Jamie Lee Curtis, Donald Pleasence; director, John Carpenter.) *Reviewed.*

*INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS (United Artists)

A sleek new version of Don Siegel's 50s classic, wittily updated and relocated in San Francisco, with some fine nervy images of urban paranoia mingling with the explicit horror of the pod people. Clever effects, unfortunately, stifle the dread of an emotionless new world. (Donald Sutherland, Brooke Adams, Leonard Nimoy; director, Philip Kaufman.) *Reviewed.*

*JUST A GIGOLÓ (Tedderwick)

David Bowie as a Prussian Candide whose quest for glory ends with him turning gigolo, then martyr to the Nazi cause, in Berlin between the wars. Erratically funny, but the atmosphere could teach *Cabaret* a lesson or two in discretion, and the ladies (Dietrich, Kim Novak, Sydne Rome) are great. (Maria Schell, Curd Jürgens; director, David Hemmings.)

*NATIONAL LAMPOON'S ANIMAL HOUSE (CIC)

Harold Lloyd would undoubtedly have recognised the timeless, money-spinning quality of the albeit vulgar proceedings in this campus comedy (the oafish men of Delta fraternity house struggle against the threat of expulsion). Set in 1962, the film actually celebrates a more recent youthful taste for this conservative brand of comedy. (John Belushi, Stephen Furst, Thomas Hulce; director, John Landis.)

*NIGHTHAWKS (Cinegate)

This rather doleful portrait of a not notably predatory homosexual teacher, who spends his nights searching for sexual companions, remains—despite the hesitant uncertainty of its conception—a bold attempt by two British independents, Ron Peck and Paul Hallam, to bring some of the facts of homosexual life out into the open. (Ken Robertson.)

*NOSFERATU THE VAMPYRE (Fox)

Werner Herzog's characteristically idiosyncratic reworking of the Dracula story. Visually extraordinary, with whole blocks of images taking the breath away; but unbalanced by a shaky structure and a script which betrays an uncertain appreciation of English literary idiom. (Klaus Kinski, Bruno Ganz, Isabelle Adjani.) *Reviewed.*

*PARADISE ALLEY (CIC)

Familiar Sylvester Stallone territory (New York's Hell's Kitchen in 1946) as two brothers manipulate their ox-like sibling into a brutalising wrestling career; but his Runyonesque characters and dialogue are, as always, a delight. (Lee Canalito, Armand Assante; director, Sylvester Stallone.)

**PRIVATE FILES OF J. EDGAR HOOVER, THE (ITC)

Fascinating mixture of mosaic and gangster movie recounting the career of America's notorious FBI chief, ending in the posthumous climax of Watergate and an intriguingly educated guess as to the identity of Deep Throat. (Broderick Crawford, Michael Parks, Dan Dailey; director, Larry Cohen.)

*RAIN PEOPLE, THE (Cinegate)

The 'personal' statement that *Finian's Rainbow* enabled Coppola to make in 1969, much as *The Godfather* would later permit *The Conversation*. The religious intensity of its imagery finally buries more than it reveals about the trauma of its heroine—a New York housewife who one day flees the demands of home/husband/imminent child—but creates a powerful end-of-the-road-movie atmosphere. (Shirley Knight, James Caan, Robert Duvall.)

**REMEMBER MY NAME (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Assured, notably well-acted and satisfyingly elusive tale of the revenge of an ex-con (Geraldine Chaplin) on her ex-husband (Anthony Perkins). Spiked with humour and delving deep into the byways of paranoia, this feature establishes Alan Rudolph in the front rank of new American directors. (Berry Berenson, Moses Gunn, Jeff Goldblum.) *Reviewed.*

*SCENIC ROUTE, THE (BFI)

A uniquely surreal soap opera, in which the emotional entanglements may only be taking place in the fantasies of the central character/diary. Mark Rappaport plays out this melodrama of everyday life with a witty range of cultural reference and distancing visual irony. (Randy Danson, Marilyn Jones, Kevin Wade.)

SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND (CIC)

Hideously misbegotten attempt to elaborate on the characters and songs included in the Beatles' famous album. Director Michael Schultz's proven skill at propelling a musical narrative is neutralised by the script's vulgar whimsy and the cast's intransigence. (Peter Frampton, Barry Gibb, Frankie Howerd, Donald Pleasence.)

**SKIP TRACER (Contemporary)

Pared down, low-key Canadian film, charting the moral regeneration of a Vancouver debt collector whose victims' human weakness finally breaks through the icy surface of his enforcement methods. An impressive feature debut by Zale Dalen, though undercut by the moral simplicity of its dénouement. (David Peterson, John Lazarus, Rudy Szabo.)

*SOMEBODY KILLED HER HUSBAND (Trident-Barber)

Miscalculated attempt to revive the *Thin Man* formula for comedy-thrills. Engaging performance by Jeff Bridges, but Reginald Rose's script produces yards of cute whimsy instead of wit. (Farrah Fawcett-Majors, John Wood; director, Lamont Johnson.)

*SUPERMAN (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Richard Donner's attenuated, expensive and not notably 'miraculous' attempt to create a Panavision universe for Clark Kent, that modest 30s comic-book hero, really only succeeds in its middle section, where Glenn Ford and Phyllis Thaxter, Superman's adoptive parents, gaze in genuine wonder at the boy's feats against the rolling expanses of the Midwest. (Christopher Reeve, Marlon Brando, Margot Kidder, Gene Hackman.)

TOO MANY CHEFS (GTO)

Would-be black comedy in which, to quote the title of the original novel, someone is killing the great chefs of Europe. Robert Morley, as a gourmet food critic, works hard to turn stodge into soufflé, but even he cannot compete with Ted Kotcheff's ponderous direction and indigestible performances from Jacqueline Bisset and George Segal. (Jean-Pierre Cassel.)

**VIOLETTE NOZIERE (Curzon)

Extremely striking but oddly baffling Chabrol film in which the desire to respect the lacunae in the evidence—the source being a real-life murder case of 1934—seems to have inhibited the usual Langian clarity of his *mise en scène*. (Isabelle Huppert, Stéphane Audran, Jean Carmet.) *Reviewed.*

*WIZ, THE (CIC)

Over-elaborated adaptation of the Broadway musical which transplanted *The Wizard of Oz* to contemporary Harlem, the subway and multi-storey parking lots (superb settings by Tony Walton). Diana Ross makes a rather maternal Dorothy and the dance ensembles are tiresomely prolonged; otherwise quite charming and ingenious. (Michael Jackson, Ted Ross, Nipsey Russell; director, Sidney Lumet.)

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